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WORK DISCUSSION SEMINARS:

A PSYCHOANALYTIC APPROACH

TO TRAINING COMMUNITY CHILDCARE WORKERS

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Degree awarded with distinction on 27 June 2000

A research report submitted to the Faculty of Education,
University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg,
in partial fulfilment of the requirement for the Degree of
Master of Education (Educational Psychology),
March 2000.

ABSTRACT

The aim of this study was to consider the contribution that psychoanalytically-informed work can make to the training of workers in the field of Early Childhood Development in South Africa. The model chosen for the purposes of this study was the Work Discussion Seminar, based on a model developed at the Tavistock Clinic in London. Six subjects, all educare workers running their own crèches, were recruited. Five out of the six participants belonged to the Impilo Pilot Project, an action research project launched by the Gauteng Department of Education in 1997. The subjects took part in six Work Discussion Seminars once a week, for six weeks. Discussions focused upon the behaviour and inner preoccupations of various children, as well as on the conscious and unconscious responses of the workers to these children's communications. The seminars were based upon the view that caregivers of young children need nurture and understanding themselves, in order to fulfil the demanding role of child rearing. Data from recordings of discussions in the sessions and from pre- and post-interview measures showed that the participants appreciated the opportunity of working in a group, which encouraged the sharing of ideas and also provided containment for their work-related anxieties. In addition, it revealed that the impact of discussions extended beyond the boundaries of the seminars themselves in that suggestions made and understandings reached were shared with crèche assistants, as well as with the parents of the children concerned.

KEY WORDS

Work Discussion Seminars, Early Childhood Development (ECD), Educare Workers, Containment, Countertransference

DECLARATION

I declare that this research report is my own, unaided work. It is being submitted for the Degree of Master of Education (Educational Psychology) at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination to any other university.



Nicole Sosnovik

March 2000

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CHAPTER 1: BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

1.1 Introduction

In post-apartheid South Africa, only one in ten children under six years old has access to proper water, sanitation, nutrition and educational facilities. Sixteen percent are underweight and twenty percent are stunted in growth. Abuse, rape and AIDS statistics are horrifyingly large. Unemployment rates for the black population remain at forty to fifty percent and welfare benefits are still virtually non-existent (Miller,1999). However, there is no computation available of the mental correlates of these physical deprivations and traumas.

These factors challenge the legitimacy of engaging in mental health activities rather than working in community developmental or feeding schemes. However, from a psychoanalytically-informed perspective, a strong conviction of the importance of attention to the inner as well as the outer world goes some way to meeting these concerns. This is supported by the work of South African researchers such as Linda Richter, who has shown that even if food is supplied, depressed and despairing mothers and caretakers cannot help children to thrive, unless they themselves receive nurture and understanding (in Miller, 1999). This view is the springboard from which the present study is launched.

It is within the context of the above that the aims of this study were set:

- a consideration of the very complicated question of the contribution that can be made by psychoanalytically-informed work with caretakers of young children in South Africa;
- a consideration of whether there is a potential for building viable training structures based on psychoanalytically-informed models.

Owing to the fact that there is still no state provision for nursery education, care for pre-school children has long been an urgent national problem, especially as the migrant labour system undermined extended-family resources. In South Africa there are thousands of unregistered, unofficial childminders, doing the best they can, hampered by a lack of training, equipment and support.

As a response to this widespread problem, work with caretakers of pre-school children, which includes both preventive and corrective aspects, has been initiated under the auspices of the 'Goodstart Programme' which is based on the 'Under Fives Workshop' of the Tavistock Clinic. Since 1995, the

Goodstart Programme has run several blocks of Work Discussion Seminars with trainers, supervisors, teachers and assistants in individual pre-schools, mainly in the Soweto area. The Goodstart Programme began with the intention of hearing descriptions of individual children who were giving cause for concern. The hope was to encourage closer observation and a process of thinking together, with emphasis on the importance of current conditions and early history in shaping behaviour (Miller, 1999).

A similar block of Work Discussion Seminars was conducted for the purposes of this study with six pre-school workers in the Greater Soweto area. The seminars were run by a child and adolescent psychotherapist and by the writer.

A Work Discussion Seminar is a group consisting of five to eight participants. The participants bring recorded observations of their experiences at work to the seminar. The participant presenting reads aloud the written material and adds thoughts as they occur. The resulting dialogue between presenter and seminar members brings to light many further details and allows for the exploration of the emotional aspects of the work setting. These could include both the inner preoccupations of the child being studied, as well as a clarification of the conscious and unconscious responses of the worker to the child's communications. These seminars prove helpful to people working and struggling with often very distressed and disturbed children and enable them to find meaning in children's behaviour. They are also reported to reduce workers' confusion and anxiety and to stimulate their imagination (Rustin, 1987).

Six such seminars were conducted with the pre-school workers involved over a period of six weeks. The issues raised in the seminars provide the basis for this study, which submits that:

- psychoanalytically-informed work is applicable within a South African context;
- there is potential for enhancing pre-school workers' understanding of young children's emotional functioning and well-being, through the vehicle of a Work Discussion Seminar.

1.2 Literature Review

The Literature Review is divided into three parts. The first part examines the literature which pertains to the principles, development and functioning of Work Discussion Seminars, a training method initiated at the Tavistock Clinic in London. The second part investigates the field of Early Childhood Development and the third part discusses principles drawn from the Community Psychology movement.

1.2.1 Work Discussion Seminars

1.2.1.1 Principles

Most of the literature referring to and describing Work Discussion Seminars emanates from the pre-clinical training, at the Tavistock Clinic in London, of child psychotherapists, as well as other individuals working closely with children. This training focuses, in the first instance, on the interaction between babies and their mothers, as well as other members of the family, through the method of Infant Observation, developed by Esther Bick in 1948 (Rustin, 1987). Rustin (1989) explains that the systematic observation of the development of infants provides the observer with an opportunity to encounter primitive emotional states in the infant and his/her family, as well as in the observer's own response to this turbulent environment. This experience, according to Rustin, plays a vital role in preparing potential therapists for clinical work.

The Work Discussion model evolved from a belief that the mental health service should not be restricted to those who could afford it. In England, in the period after World War Two, many adherents of psychoanalysis identified with the goals of social reconstruction especially insofar as they affected family and social integration. According to Rustin (1995), many psychoanalytically-trained professionals came to work in the National Health Service, loyal to the principles of a universal health service with a community, curative and preventive mental health dimension.

1.2.1.1(a) The Containing Function Of Work Discussion Seminars

It was Bion's thesis (1962) that the way in which a mother is able to get in contact with her baby's state of mind, and through her attention and support, to enable the baby to grow psychologically, constitutes a form of relationship in which the mother's mind acts as a container for the baby. He called this relationship "container-contained" and he used it as a model, both for thinking about the development of the mind and also as an analogue for other emotional relationships. In Bion's terms, this kind of receptivity to being stirred up emotionally is the basis for our capacity to be responsive in all those occasions throughout life when we are brought into intimate contact with someone else's state of mind (Rustin, 1989).

In the case of a Work Discussion Seminar, the seminar leader's role in helping to process the observer's feelings is paramount to the observation method, not least because of the way in which it mirrors, both consciously and unconsciously, the mother's "processing" of her infant's experience. Pedder (1986) has drawn parallels between the supervision of trainees and childhood development, in

the sense that the trainee or "infant" needs firm support. Shuttleworth (1989) points out that a well-functioning seminar group may act as a "container" for the observer's experience. According to McFadyen (1991) a systemic model based on Bion's idea of "container-contained" is a useful way to conceptualise this process. As the mother has to "contain" the child in order that the child can tackle the next developmental step, so the tutor has to hold the trainee so that the trainee can start to think about the experience of observation and, in particular, tolerate the anxiety associated with the confusion of "not knowing".

1.2.1.2(b) Counter-Transference Considerations

Emotions aroused in the observer are important and should not be regarded as "a distraction or contaminant" but rather as "an indispensable tool to be used in the service of greater understanding" (Miller, 1989, p. 3). Martha Harris (1977) cautions that attention must be paid to whether the emotion evoked in the observer or seminar members is appropriate. In this way the seminar members are encouraged to make use of their own feelings, recognising that these are a valuable part of imaginative perception without which any relationship and any attitude to work is two-dimensional. It is vital, conversely, to recognise when some of the feeling evoked is not a true response to something actually communicated by the child, but an arousal of inappropriate emotions connected with unresolved infantile conflicts in the observer/seminar member himself/herself.

Technically, in psychoanalytic theory, the positive use for purposes of understanding of unconscious communications from patients is known as 'counter-transference'. What was at first regarded mainly as a potential distortion of analytic work, came later to be seen as a positive resource. There are many indications given of the observer's awareness of his/her own feelings as one aspect of the situation

> equires reflection in order to assess what they can reveal both about himself/herself and about e/she is observing (Rustin, 1989).

The boundary between a task-orientated group and a therapeutic group may easily become an issue. It should be clear that a group of colleagues, meeting in their work setting, is not an appropriate membership for a therapeutic group. However, the method of eliciting detailed information and encouraging careful observation puts the members of the group in touch with the pain and aggression of their clients in a way that is not encountered when abstraction and labelling are used. This can breach the defence mechanisms usually employed so that, if interpretation cannot be used, other containing measures need to be taken. A structured approach which requires a prepared and detailed

presentation of problems is one containing factor. Another safeguard is to move flexibly between a didactic approach and a dialectic and reflective mode. At all times it must be borne in mind that the priority is training and that the group members are there as fully responsible adult professionals and are not patients or clients (Miller, 1997).

1.2.1.2 Development

Martha Harris is acknowledged for her role in developing the pre-clinical training of child psychotherapists as conceived by Esther Bick. She developed the term 'Work Discussion Seminar', "a very unpretentious and even mundane name for what turned out to be a hugely creative conception." The Tavistock's course for teachers on counselling aspects of the teacher's role grew from this conception and Work Discussion Seminars have become a standard component of many other courses, as a result of Martha Harris's conviction that "a psychoanalytic attitude was relevant not only in the consulting room but in all settings where the understanding and management of the anxieties and conflicts of adults and children were central to the developmental possibilities inherent in the situation. This starting point made all the relationships open to a growing child at home, at school and in the wider community worthy of close study" (Rustin, 1987, in Harris Williams, p.xi).

A number of different strands of group work can be traced which were later to be adopted in many other countries. Two important figures, among others, were Balint, who established small groups for General Practitioners in Medicine, and Caplan, who devised crisis intervention models which have been used extensively in the Social Science field (Miller, 1997).

1.2.1.3 Practical Description

Briefly, students undertaking an infant observation course make arrangements to visit a family on a regular weekly basis at a fixed time for an hour. They record, afterwards, in as much detail as possible, what they have observed. Students are members of a small seminar of approximately five observers who meet weekly for 1½ hours with a seminar leader to study the material of the observations. Seminar leaders vary in their approach, but usually students take it in turn to present 'their' baby, thus giving each member a full seminar twice a term for discussion of their experiences (Rustin, 1989).

No particular technique is 'taught' in a Work Discussion Seminar. The members are encouraged to consider and discuss appropriate ways of dealing with the situations and material described, after the possible meanings have been explored. One of the central beliefs is that education in sensitivity and

awareness is a gradual process which takes place through working and discussing work with a more experienced colleague, through a close study of individuals and groups, and of one's own role and responsibility. The seminar leader's task is to elicit as fully as possible the details of the case. The seminar leader must afford the other members time in which to "feel their way into the situation and to ask questions." These questions sometimes cause the presenter to remember details he/she had not registered as important. Time is also required to consider and to try to link apparently disparate elements in the presentation in ways that can make it more meaningful to the participants (Harris, 1977, in Daws and Boston, p.295).

Depending on the aspects of the material that the seminar leader chooses to emphasise, it is also a setting in which the participants can learn a great deal about a range of topics: child development, culture, class, race, gender, attachments, the effects of social policy, interaction in the context and questions that lead them to relevant literature and research. The seminar leader can also focus the theoretical discussion of the material on a range of conceptual frameworks - cognitive, psychodynamic, systems, as the trainees begin to work on an understanding of the content of the observation material (Trowell and Miles, in Trowell and Rustin, 1991). Discussion in the seminar is viewed as an extension of the process of observation (Rustin, 1989).

It is usually found best in this learning process to encourage as far as possible the use of natural rather than theoretical language in order to encourage direct observation and clear reflection on the complexity and impact of the experience itself. One of the main purposes of infant observation (and, by extension, of other types of observation – in the classroom - for example) as an educational method is in fact to show the 'fit' in emotional experience of psychoanalytic ideas. It is felt that learning about psychoanalytic ideas in purely abstract terms is of little use if this is separated from thinking about their relation to emotional experience (Rustin, 1989). Margaret Rustin (1988) links this type of learning to Bion's distinction (1962) between 'learning about', an intellectual activity, and 'learning from experience', which leads to a kind of knowledge akin to the Biblical sense of 'knowing', being in touch with the core and essence of something or somebody. This is a form of knowledge, she concludes, imbued with emotional depth.

1.2.1.4 Work Discussion Seminars As An In-Service Training/Supervisory Tool

Martha Harris (1968) maintains that Work Discussion Seminars can be used as a type of in-service training for teachers in schools; for example, to address certain aspects of counselling, the dynamics of interpersonal relationships between individuals and groups, children and adults, parents and teachers, and personality development. Harris cautions that the establishment of mutual confidence between the consultant/seminar leader and staff is of primary importance. In addition, a seminar leader must be aware of and sensitive to teachers who may question the idea that possible help could come from talking about their pupils with someone who does not teach them himself/herself. Setting up Work Discussion Seminars in a school-type setting highlights the exceptional possibilities of the school situation in detecting and modifying problems and of the school as a potential therapeutic as well as educational institution, since children are in its care over a number of years, as well as during a large part of the day. The exchange of experiences helps teachers to feel for the problems which their colleagues encounter and to respect the work that they do (Harris, 1977).

Ander[illegible] (1967) views the role of the supervisor (and, by extension, the seminar leader) as having many of the same dimensions as the role of the classroom teacher. He suggests that just as the classroom teacher facilitates the efforts of his/her pupils to learn, the supervisor, as teacher, facilitates the efforts of teachers to increase their competence. Nolan and Francis (1992) observe that in the same way that teachers cannot "pour their knowledge into the heads of students", supervisors cannot pour knowledge into the heads of teachers. Rather, supervisors must function as collaborators who help teachers reflect on their own teaching practices as they attempt to understand the problems and dilemmas they confront (in Garland and Shippy, 1995).

One of the aspects of the Work Discussion Seminar which seminar members often find frustrating is the fact that the purpose of the discussion is not to reach conclusions that lead to decisions concerning, or definitive diagnoses of, any one child discussed. Rather it is to enlarge interests and to encourage second thoughts, to broaden the base of understanding from which any teacher concerned would act when appropriate (Harris, 1977). It is often difficult for teachers, or any other seminar members, to bear in mind that they might not know the right direction and that, as a result, the Work Discussion Seminar may seem formless and disintegrated at times.

Blumberg (1980) reports the findings of studies in which he examined teachers' perceptions of their interaction with supervisors. He found that teachers perceive supervisors as having different behavioural styles. He describes four supervisory styles:

i) Style A: High Direct, High Indirect: The teacher sees the supervisor emphasising both direct and indirect behaviour. He/She tells and criticises, but also asks and listens.

ii) Style B: High Direct, Low Indirect: The teacher perceives the supervisor as doing a great deal of telling and criticising but very little asking or listening.

iii) Style C: Low Direct, High Indirect: The supervisor's behaviour is rarely direct (telling, criticising and so forth). Instead he/she puts a lot of emphasis on asking questions, listening and reflecting back the teachers' ideas and feelings.

iv) Style D: Low Direct, Low Indirect: The teacher sees the supervisor as passive, not doing much of anything.

Blumberg's findings suggest that supervisory behaviour described as "low direct, high indirect" (i.e. Style C) leads to the development of empathic relationships. He interpreted these results to mean that teachers find their interaction with supervisors productive when the supervisors are primarily indirect, or both indirect and direct (in Garland and Shippy, 1995). The supervisory style "low direct, high indirect" would be an alternative means of articulating and describing the seminar leader's task in leading a Work Discussion Seminar.

Glickman and Bey (1990) present a review on the interpersonal dimension of supervision. They summarise several studies that indicate that interpersonal behaviours such as care, consideration, appreciation and respect are positively related to teachers' perceptions of supervisory effectiveness. They conclude that a supportive relationship between supervisor and teacher is critical to the success of the supervisory process. Blumberg (1980) points out that interpersonal work can be productive only when there is a balance between the energy devoted to the work itself and the energy devoted to the development of positive relationships amongst those engaged in the work (in Garland and Shippy).

1.2.2 Issues related To Early Childhood Development (ECD)

This section of the Literature Review investigates the field of ECD – the current situation in South Africa and the training of practitioners -- in order to provide a context which would illustrate how Work Discussion Seminars as a training technique and supervisory tool could benefit those working in the field of ECD.

1.2.2.1 Current Status Of ECD Worldwide

Katz (1995) refers to a description of the ideal qualifications for pre-school teachers, given by Jessie Stanton: "She should have a fair education ... by this I mean she should have a doctor's degree in psychology and medicine. Sociology as a background is advisable. She should be an experienced carpenter, mason, mechanic, plumber and a thoroughly trained musician and poet ... Now at 83, she is ready!" (Beyer, 1968). Katz continues that a more contemporary version of the ideal qualifications for pre-school teachers would most likely add special education, linguistics, ethnic studies, anthropology and ecology. Such all-encompassing qualifications reflect the broad range of functions assumed by adults working with young children.

The younger the child, the greater is the range of his or her functioning for which adults must assume responsibility. It is precisely this formulation of the adults' role that causes grave concern with regard to the lives of teachers, childcare workers and others who work daily with the young (Katz, pp.140-141).

Martha Harris (1972) briefly outlines the requirements for providing a good environment in which to raise a child or young person: "To begin with, he needs a place where he feels contained, where he is known, where he has an opportunity to become acquainted with people and, from their responses to him, to get to know himself. Although his mother initially and his family provide the first place of containment, the next in time and ordinarily the next in importance is provided by the school. At school he will not usually receive from his teachers – and as a rule will not need to receive – the same closeness and detailed attention which he required from his parents in the first formative years. But probably every child needs throughout his years of growth some degree of individual attention and respect from some of his educators, as well as opportunities to feel that his questions and opinions are of interest, are valued. Having a chance to express himself with freedom in different ways is not the same as indulgence. The child will freely do this only if he can trust the adult world which has to take ultimate responsibility for him until adolescence" (p. 311).

It may be difficult for staff whose relationships with children are obviously much less central than that of parent and child to believe that what they offer is of value. However, non-interpretive yet containing conversation is an everyday feature of many playgroups, nurseries and daycare centres and can help children through some of their struggles with painful feelings. Such contact seems especially useful when there is a major event in the family such as a new birth; the older child will then have additional

opportunity to work on some of his feelings. Thoughtful relationships within daycare centres in which children may spend fairly long hours apart from their families are clearly particularly important. The worker can use his/her own observation and experience of the child to relate to his/her current feelings and try to think about them appropriately with him/her (Copley and Forryan, 1998).

1.2.2.2 Working Conditions Within The Field Of ECD

According to Katz (1995) working conditions in many childcare centres in the United States are poor. She quotes Keyserling (1972) who summarised some findings on working conditions, stating, "... the pay is so low that we are asking thousands of non-professional workers to subsidise the care of children of other women. We are also excluding from the day care field many women of intelligence and competence who cannot afford to accept salaries as low as some of those described, no matter how rewarding is work with youngsters, in human terms" (p. 153).

Another aspect of working conditions in pre-school settings, especially daycare centres, seems to be an apparently deep sense of isolation reported by many childcare workers. Many report feeling overwhelmed by the children's obvious emotional needs. Others report experiencing frustration and anguish from the knowledge of individual client families' personal and economic distress and of the way many aspects of modern urban life impinge upon the lives of the families they serve. A caring childcare worker could easily and quickly be burned out from such intense involvement in clients' troubles. Katz suspects that many childcare workers respond to their working situation by becoming depressed, sometimes indifferent and perhaps too distant from the children. She continues that this may result in low concentration, low vigilance and a generally low rate of responding to children. Such conditions would seem to reduce the likelihood that adults would be alert enough to tailor their responses to children's signals and meanings. Often adults working in such situations seem to fall into the habit of talking to one another much of the time (Weir, 1973, in Katz). Katz has identified what seems to be a fairly reliable and universal correlation: the younger the child with whom the pre-school educator works, the less training he/she will have received, the lower the pay, prestige and status he/she has, and often, the longer the working hours.

Katz advises that measures be sought to reduce the isolation of childcare workers and to provide advisory services. She suggests that small and regular onsite workshops for groups of colleagues would strengthen mutual support among co-workers. These workshops could focus, inter alia, on the following issues: the teachers' understanding of the situation, maintaining competencies already

acquired, building long-term relationships, maintaining an optimum distance, cultivating the habit of suspending judgment, phrasing suggestions in experimental form and helping teachers to define achievable objectives. In addition, workshops could serve the function of a neutraliser of conflicts that might arise among childcare workers.

Martha Harris (1968) reports that in her work in a comprehensive school, on a number of occasions teachers' relief was outspoken about the opportunity to discuss questions and decisions with the consultants. "Even though it turns out that there is nothing more we could have done, at least it is a relief to know that we've done the best we could in the circumstances, and to see the picture a little more clearly" (p. 308).

Work Discussion Seminars are one forum for effective, sustainable, empowering intervention. They can address anguish in adults through their parenting and in children with their parents. They can demonstrate that anxieties and fears can be safely expressed and heard, both at an individual and societal level. They target the family, and in particular, women and children, and they permit intervention at the earliest stages of human development, before problems become entrenched. They allow for both community and specialist input. Trends in developmental and paediatric work, as well as in psychotherapeutic work with children, strongly suggest that intervention that is early can have powerful preventive results. In order to reach children, the women – mothers and caretakers who bear the physical and emotional burden of child-rearing – need to be reached. One of the premises underlying setting up Work Discussion Seminars with these caretakers of children is that if the 'children' inside these mothers and caretakers can be heard, they will be more able to hear their children. Acknowledgement of the internal child, in pain, in any adult, male or female, provides some opportunity for healing (Caplan, Cingo, Gower & Miller, 1997).

1.2.2.3 Training In ECD

There is no systematic training in South Africa for young childcare workers which deals centrally with the emotional and psychosocial aspects of children's development, and in the existing courses, little attention is paid to these elements. The majority of the population of South Africa has hitherto been denied mental health services and it is vital to build up community resources (Miller, 1997). Gower, Caplan, Miller and Sithole (1998) express the widely-held belief that the basis of mental health and psychosocial development is laid down in early childhood. According to them, professional caretakers

of young children themselves need nurture and support in order to fulfil the demanding role of child rearing.

One participant of a series of Work Discussion Seminars run in 1997 comments: "Even though we always say our main goal is to develop the whole child – that is physically, mentally, socially and emotionally – the emotional part is not well looked after. I don't think I realised that children were not just naughty, but that there was something deeper. We women of Soweto are so burdened and we didn't even know it. Until this point we had no forum to talk about ourselves. We would talk but not relate as people ... The experience of the seminars emphasised the importance of this and the importance of a time and place to think about ourselves and the children with whom we work" (Gower et al, 1998).

1.2.2.4 ECD From A Social And Economic Perspective

The extended family in African society has traditionally been the primary caregiver and educator of young children, particularly from birth to age six, the years after which young children start primary school. In Kenya and other sub-Saharan African nations, early childhood care and education services, including feeding programmes, and the majority of nursery schools, are funded primarily by parents and the local community (Swadener, Kabiru and Njenga, 1995).

Similarly in South Africa, members of the extended family and the nuclear family have traditionally made a major contribution to the care and education of young children. However, the social and economic dynamics of the African family, characterised by inequality and injustice in the distribution of resources and services under the system of apartheid, have left young children living in inadequate housing, poor nutrition, and sometimes left without adult supervision. Lack of adequate early care and education services poses another problem for young children. It often manifests itself not only in malnutrition and high rates of infant mortality, but in high rates of repetition and dropping out of school in later years (Goduka, 1997).

In South Africa, 31% of pre-school children have been found to be underweight owing to poor nutrition. The most basic needs for food and safe shelter are not being met in respect of a large proportion of the black population. Homelessness is an enormous problem. This results in 'squatting' which is now the way 51% of black families live (Eckstein, 1994).

Children, who do attend crèche, are generally dropped off very early in the morning, often by older brothers and sisters on their way to school. In the evening the supervisors are frequently left with children who have not been fetched and sometimes have to make room for them for the night – if need be, even in their own beds (Haggie, 1994).

1.2.2.5 Psychological Effects Of Poverty On Young Children

Adversity during childhood is produced by a range of circumstances. On the one hand there are clearly structural causes which include poverty and political oppression, and on the other there are circumstances which arise in interpersonal contexts, such as the family, or through accident and illness. By the standards of those modern societies within which most psychological knowledge has been generated, the majority of South African children can be considered to be grossly disadvantaged and as being at risk for less than optimal psychological development. This is mainly due to structurally generated conditions of disadvantage. There is also a range of major life struggles that are generated within the interpersonal realm to which all South African children may be subject. These include such risks as being subjected to sexual or physical abuse, experiencing the stress of divorce, and living with parental psychiatric illness or alcoholism. While the primary site of these adversities is usually the family or the school, it is clear that the risks of being exposed to them are higher in poor communities where adult coping is frequently stretched to the limit (Dawes and Donald, 1994).

Single parenthood, the absence of fathers from the home, and female-headed households are common amongst black families in South Africa (Richter and Griesel, 1986b). Households without fathers have been a consistent feature of South African life ever since the imposition of taxes forced rural men into urban employment (Lidell, Kvalsvig, Shabalala and Masilela, 1991). The extent to which families are broken up is illustrated by figures quoted by Simkins (1986): approximately one-third of husbands live away from their wives and nearly 20% of children under the age of 15 years live apart from their mothers.

Recent writings have stressed that poverty affects child-rearing by diminishing the capacity for supportive, consistent and child-centred parenting (McLoyd, 1990b; Halpern, 1990). The major mediating link between hardship and parenting is psychological distress originating from endemic adversity and negative life events. According to McLoyd (1990b), such distress could account for all the reported features of low-SES parenting – a diminished expression of affection, a diminished responsiveness to socio-emotional needs explicitly expressed by a child, a tendency to issue commands

without explanation, a greater use of physical punishment, and a lowered likelihood of rewarding a child verbally. However, in addition, over-stressed, poor parents may also adversely influence their children in indirect ways through the communication of their despondency and despair (McLoyd and Wilson 1990).

A consciousness on the part of parents of the importance of their behaviour to children's development as well as a belief in their capacity to fulfil their children's physical and emotional needs, has been found in several studies to be the axis around which optimum childcare takes place (Roosa, Fitzgerald and Carlson, 1982; Tinsley and Holtgrave, 1989). These mental states are, in turn, a reflection of the wider social relationships in which parents participate. Instead of a strong sense of internality and child-centredness. external pressures may become so great that parents project, instead, their own state of dejection onto their children.

It is probably the cumulative balance between stress and support that determines individual differences in parental care (Vondra and Toth, 1989). Social support networks are thought to affect parental behaviour through at least three paths of influence. The first is through the provision of emotional support, the second through the exercise of social controls over parenting styles, and the third through the provision of models of parenting and social behaviour (Cochran and Brassard, 1979).

Well-conceived, quality early childhood programmes help meet the diverse needs of young children during the crucial early years of life, enhance their readiness for schooling, and have a positive and permanent influence on later schooling achievement. In addition, countries that succeed in mobilising effective partnership between all government and non-government role-players in the care and evaluation of young children have been able to decentralise and innovate in their educational systems, and at the same time, make an important contribution toward community development and family education. This partnership should include all provincial departments, local government, communities and voluntary organisations (Metcalf, 1998).

In this light, the value that Work Discussion Seminars have to contribute to the training of ECD practitioners is clear. They have the potential to provide a forum in which educational, social and emotional issues can be brought to light and considered simultaneously, producing a continuously developing understanding of the whole child. In addition, they provide an opportunity for ECD practitioners to become more aware of the emotional impact of their work on themselves.

1.2.3 Community Psychology

In this section, the principles drawn from the community psychology movement are discussed. This is done in order to demonstrate how the notion of a Work Discussion Seminar can be adapted to meet the needs of the South African situation, in which the gap between trained professional and under-trained practitioner is ever-increasing. Work Discussion Seminars are proposed as one way in which to begin bridging this gap. In addition, this section provides a brief description of the communities within which the present study was developed.

1.2.3.1 Principles Of Community Psychology

Cook (1970) presents the movement of community psychology as an attitude or ideology, the basic orientation of which is the study of human problems and a commitment to the improvement of the human condition. Central to the standpoint of this movement is that, inasmuch as traditional ways of helping people have been unsuccessful, or at best, inefficient, new ways of meeting human needs must be found (in Skuy, 1975). Orford (1992) argues that community psychology is both an area of research and a branch of academic study of psychology and at the same time a branch of a helping profession. It is about understanding *and* helping. Orford contends that it is easier to commit oneself to being either an academic or a practitioner. For this reason, historically, most people have leaned towards one side or other of the psycho-social divide, interested more in the emotions, thoughts and actions of individual people or in people as social and political animals.

The various aspects of community psychology include the following: a) ensuring that the links between treatment and living are strengthened; b) embracing 'problem groups' within its framework that are often rejected; c) providing links between different facets of the individual's life; d) attempting to maximise the individual-environment interaction, thereby promoting optimal functioning and self-actualisation; e) encouraging interdisciplinary approaches to problems; f) utilising appropriate volunteers, non-professionals and sub-professionals in an attempt to reach more individuals and to provide these individuals with appropriate and pervasive therapeutic experiences (Skuy, 1975).

Community psychology is an applied subject. In other words, it is a practical subject, concerning itself with trying to change things at various levels, from micro to macro (Orford, 1992). It is based on a wish to share the fruits of psychological understanding and knowledge as widely as possible within the community. This is partly for practical reasons, since the numbers of trained mental health workers, let

alone psychologists, is nowhere near adequate to deal directly with those psychological problems already known to exist (Albee, 1968; Hawks, 1973).

The predilection for sharing psychology derives mostly from the strongly held belief in community psychology that psychological expertise resides principally amongst the residents of a community themselves and amongst the many human service workers who have special helping roles within the community, but who have little or no special training in psychology. Someone with this orientation will tend to be positively disposed towards sharing psychology with other workers and towards the psychological work of people in the community with little or no formal training, as well as towards mutual aid or self-help approaches (Rappaport, 1977).

Non-professionals are uniquely placed to implement the various aspects of community psychology and are thus the appropriate agents of this approach. For, apart from alleviating the severe shortages in the mental health fields, and reaching those communities and categories of individual which would otherwise never be reached, the non-professionals can be seen as the 'shock troops' of the community psychology movement. Because they are not identified with professionals and their clearly-defined roles, they are likely to gain access more readily to a given individual and are more able to enter his/her milieu. They are therefore able to serve a 'bridging function' between professionals and their target populations (Pearl and Riessman, 1965, in Skuy, 1975).

In addition, it is the teachers, nurses, social workers, lawyers, and many others, who deal with the largest proportion of psychological distress, since the prevalence of psychological problems amongst both children and adults is far higher than would allow for everyone in need to receive specialist help. Yet psychology was unlikely to have been the main priority in their training, nor is understanding and responding to psychological difficulty likely to be the first priority in the organisations for which they work (Orford, 1992).

It is for this reason that finding ways of sharing psychological formulations and interventions with workers in human services has become one of the main preoccupations of community psychology. From the community psychology perspective, what goes on between nurses and their patients, or between teachers and their more troublesome pupils, is of greater significance for the psychological health of a community than the relatively small number of individual treatments that can be delivered

by psychological specialists. The latter must, to use Miller's (1969) phrase, "Give psychology away" to the nurses, police and teachers who are, in effect, the real psychological practitioners.

The expression "giving psychology away" has an unwelcome ring to it since it implies that expert power resides with the psychological specialist who is able to offer or withhold knowledge which only he/she possesses. However, the relationship should be egalitarian in the sense that the consultant has expertise that the consultee wants, but the consultee as 'customer' is in charge. Caplan (1970) is clear that consultation should not be confused with therapy for the consultee. The two goals of consultation are to help the consultee improve his handling or understanding of the current work difficulty and, through this, to increase his capacity to master future problems of a similar type.

Orford (1992) maintains that one of the reasons psychology has been less widely shared in the past is that no framework has existed to guide the process of sharing. Hence, professionals with psychological expertise to share have felt uneasy about so doing, as if sharing was not a legitimate part of their professional roles.

Work Discussion Seminars as a training and supervisory tool have the unique potential to draw upon all the above-mentioned principles of community psychology. Moreover, they have the potential of providing a framework in which 'psychological knowledge' can be shared. Work Discussion Seminars provide a relatively small number of trained professionals the opportunity to work with, educate and learn from a larger number of untrained and/or under-trained practitioners. They offer the participants the opportunity of benefiting from shared experience, of viewing a particular situation through different eyes, of exploring practical suggestions on how to talk to young children and approach their parents. In addition, the participants, through their interaction with the other participants of the seminars, are able to extend this type of interacting and thinking about difficulties to the ways in which they conduct their relationships with colleagues in the microcosm of their own work settings.

1.2.3.2 Context Within Which The Study Was Developed

Impilo Pilot Project

Five out of the six participants in this study are members of the Impilo Pilot Project.

Impilo is an action research project aimed at solving problems through dialogue. It was launched by the Gauteng Department of Education (GDE) in June 1997 and is the GDE's response to achieving

'Education for All'. Impilo is a series of linked pilot projects which will develop and test new multi-functional models of ECD provision over a three-year period through cycles of action and reflection. Funds from the national ECD pilot project have been augmented and distributed to approximately 1000 sites (ie: daycare centres, crèches, nursery schools) spread across Gauteng, accommodating approximately 40 000 children.

A developmental approach is being followed and pilot sites have been selected in order to target children in greatest need and particularly those in family-based services. An important requirement for funding through Impilo is family participation and community governance of the service. The GDE is committed to a collaborative approach to supporting families in meeting the needs of young children. The objective is to deepen understanding of the needs and circumstances of young children and to build partnerships to overcome barriers to child development. The key Impilo message is based on the following basic principles: a) the first years of a child's life are the most important years for development; b) partnership is essential for meeting the basic needs of all children in Gauteng; c) government policy for children must respond to their particular needs and circumstances; d) all children have the right to 10 years of free and compulsory education starting in the year they turn 7.

Sites where children's needs were not being met were intentionally selected for inclusion in Impilo. Many of the sites were placing children at risk because of poor conditions, lack of safety, overcrowding, few or no activities being provided for the children and, often, the lack of training, experience and confidence of the practitioners. As part of the Impilo Pilot Project, the GDE is subsidising these sites to help provide resources and improve their physical environments. Contracted Resource and Training Organisations (RTO'S) provide training and support to develop the practitioners further. One practitioner from each of the sites receives training from one of the contracted RTO consortia, including the African Self Help Association (ASHA), Woz'Obona and PEPPS, among many others (Impilo Dialogue – District Pilot Update August 1998; Metcalf, 1998; GDE Draft of Green Paper, October 1998). (Refer to Appendix 2 for photographs of particpants' educare centres.)

The training offered to ECD practitioners is based on a 'levels' approach. The levels approach assumes that the following areas of learning are covered: work with children, work with adults, work with systems (Phillips, 1998, pp. 41-42). The levels approach encompasses an experience-based adult education approach, pioneered, among others by the Early Learning Resource Unit (ELRU) from Cape Town. Organisations like ASHA have brought this approach to Gauteng (ASHA tender, 1997).

Each RTO has its own history of promoting early childhood development and training to childcare workers in Gauteng. For this reason, their valuable experience in this field has been called upon by the GDE in its attempt to collaborate, on all levels, with the relevant participants and stakeholders in the field of ECD.

Two RTO's are discussed below because it is through them that the writer was introduced to the Impilo Pilot Project.

ASHA (African Self Help Association)

ASHA started its work in 1949 in Orlando and grew out of an organisation called the Association of European and African Women. The founders were liberal-minded whites, who began to work with a group of blacks who were mainly Anglican Mission educated, to identify and to cater to the needs of women in the new townships around Johannesburg at that time. It expanded in the fifties and sixties, especially in the field of providing pre-school education. Simple, informal day nurseries were started, first in private houses and later in specially constructed crèches. By 1954 there were 6 and by 1968 there were 29, all in their own buildings. Originally, the crèches were places of care mainly for the poor and deprived. In the 1990's a new era has emerged and the crèches are now educare centres of a high professional standard. There are now approximately 40 crèches within the ASHA fold (Haggie, 1994).

ASHA's training programmes include Level 1 and Level 2 courses supplemented by field support, parent awareness programmes, playgroups for children not currently in care and enrichment workshops.

The course content of Level 1 and 2 training includes the following broad topics: the whole child, healthy children, large muscle development, small muscle development, happy and confident children, helping children control their behaviour, learning about the world and thinking skills (Greater Soweto tender, 1997). Level 1 courses are non-formal, practical and orientational in approach, while Level 2 courses are more detailed and combine practical components with theoretical input.

The Greater Soweto Association for Early Childhood Development

The Greater Soweto Association is a non-profit umbrella body whose mission it is to help upgrade the informal pre-school centres in the deprived areas and to assist the caregivers to provide better pre-school educare. It was formed approximately 12 years ago in answer to the needs of women running

informal pre-school centres for guidance, information, support and training. The Association has 400 members, all of whom run or work in pre-school centres in Soweto, Diepmeadow, Dobsonville, Mohlakeng, Toekomsrus, Orange Farm and Vaal Triangle.

Because of the lack of formal pre-school facilities for blacks, coupled with the need of working and work-seeking parents for places of care for their pre-school children, thousands of informal centres have sprung up to provide this service. These centres, albeit unintentionally, are not always run in the best interests of the children, and most of the women involved, through no fault of their own, lack the knowledge, skills and facilities to provide good educare.

To try to improve this situation, the Greater Soweto Association has run workshops on such relevant topics as health, nutrition, the making of equipment and toys from waste materials, and children's needs and their development. Level 1 training is offered in conjunction with ASHA which had the course accredited by the Southern African Association for Early Childhood Educare (SAAECE) in 1994. All training is done in the language of the participants, as well as in English, and is certified on competence and not simply attendance, and an outside evaluator assesses the level of each centre (Greater Soweto tender, 1997).

1.2.3.3 Events Leading To This Study

The writer was introduced to the notion of a Work Discussion Seminar, and to ASHA and the Impilo Pilot Project at a conference of the International Psychoanalytic Association entitled 'Change: Psychoanalytic Perspectives' held in Cape Town in April, 1998. At this conference, the work of the 'Goodstart Programme' was showcased in a seminar given by them. The Goodstart Programme initiated a brief series of Work Discussion Groups as part of a pilot project to explore whether the opportunity for educare workers to share their pressing work problems, with the assistance of outside consultants, would add a useful dimension to their work. The idea was to train a core group of trainers in understanding the mind of the child and to help them to deal with the feelings and emotions that work with children evokes in them. The writer, interested in this particular approach of working with ECD practitioners, wanted to investigate, further, its applicability to South African circumstances.

CHAPTER 2: THE STUDY

2.1 Rationale

This study was borne out of a belief in the applicability of psychoanalytically-informed thinking to the understanding and fostering of children's emotional development, within a South African context.

A fundamental tenet of psychoanalytic theory (as of many other theories in psychology) is that the foundation of mental health is laid down in early childhood. The Work Discussion Seminar was chosen as a tool intended to promote an awareness in caregivers of the internal conflicts and difficulties experienced by young children.

Caregivers (daycare workers, ECD Practitioners) were targeted as participants in this study for several reasons:

- Psychoanalytic theories acknowledge the demanding nature of child-rearing and propose that parents and professionals caring for young children need nurture and support themselves if they are to fulfil their roles adequately (Gower et al, 1998).
- The school situation is uniquely placed to serve as a therapeutic as well as educational environment because of the large amount of time that children spend in this setting (Harris, 1968).
- Professionals who work with one another in a group-type setting are given the opportunity to develop empathy and respect for the work that their colleagues do, as well as to be supported by their colleagues through the sharing of experiences (Harris, 1977; Trevarthen and Hubley, 1978). Meeting to discuss work-related issues is one way of reducing the isolation that many people working with young children are reported to experience (Katz, 1995).
- The training offered in the field of ECD is notoriously lacking in the area of children's mental health and psychological development. Work Discussion Seminars, which emphasise detailed observation of children, afford their participants the opportunity to 'learn from experience', rather than to 'learn about' various topics in a more abstract, theoretical manner. 'Learning about' a topic would be considered a purely intellectual endeavour whereas 'learning from experience' is a type of learning imbued with emotional depth (Rustin, 1998).
- Work Discussion Seminars provide a setting in which a relatively small number of trained professionals are able to come into contact with a larger number of untrained and/or under-trained practitioners. Approaches, understandings and ideas can be shared, discussed, implemented and observed in this setting under the guiding eye of a seminar leader.

2.2 Aims Of The Study

The present study aimed to:

- consider the contribution that can be made by psychoanalytically-informed work with caretakers of young children in a South African context, bearing in mind that the foundations of psychoanalysis are bound in a European culture and set of traditions;
- consider the potential for building viable training structures based on psychoanalytically-informed models.

In order to address these aims, the vehicle of a Work Discussion Seminar was chosen. The model employed is based on regularity of sessions and interest in child development (Miller, 1999). Other than these broad outlines, Work Discussion Seminars may be characterised by their lack of a pre-determined specific agenda. The opportunity for raising difficulties is provided by the containing nature of the Work Discussion Seminar, but what is actually raised and discussed in each individual seminar is left up to the participants concerned. In this way, a picture and formulation of the difficulties being described continuously and gradually unfolds through description, discussion and attention to the minutiae of individual lives and the emotions evoked in the children described, as well as in the participants themselves.

Although there is no so-called fixed agenda in terms of the content of a Work Discussion Seminar, some of the aims include sharpening the participants' perceptions and enlarging their imagination in order that they understand more fully the underlying dynamics of the personality interactions they describe (Harris, 1977).

In an attempt to assess the benefit for the participants in this study of having taken part in the brief series of Work Discussion Seminars, the aims were to address the following areas (which could then be analysed as signs of development and progress - or lack thereof - in each participant):

- To begin to train the participants in understanding the mind of the child by emphasising the importance of looking at his/her early history and how this comes to impact upon each child in a unique manner. Looking at a child's early history involves taking into account his/her family situation, school/daycare environment as well as factors at play in the community in which the child lives, which all affect his/her mental health and emotional development (either positively or negatively).

- To introduce the idea that behaviour, as well as play, can be symbolic and can provide valuable clues towards understanding a child.
- To provide an opportunity for the participants to share their pressing work problems and to ascertain whether and in what way this adds a useful dimension to their work.
- To begin to explore and to deal with the feelings and emotions that work with children evokes in the participants themselves – counter-transference.

2.3 Method

2.3.1 Participants

2.3.1.1 Recruitment Of Participants

The writer attended a training workshop which was being held for Impilo practitioners at the training centre of the Greater Soweto Association for Early Childhood Development in Dube, in October 1998, in order to be exposed to a large audience of potential volunteers for this study. In between sessions of training the writer asked to speak to the group of approximately thirty women. The writer introduced herself as an Educational Psychology student, who was interested in working with Impilo practitioners. She described her intention of setting up a group to which practitioners would come, to which they would bring descriptions of children with whom they were experiencing difficulties of whatever sort (behavioural, emotional), which would be discussed and thought about in the group. The writer informed the practitioners that she would be assisted in the running of the group by a child and adolescent psychotherapist working in Johannesburg.

Six people volunteered. They filled in brief questionnaires informing the writer of their name, age and the ages of the children with whom they work. It was explained that there would be six groups run on an afternoon which was convenient to all concerned, once a week for six weeks. In addition to the six groups, the practitioners were informed that they would be asked to attend a short interview prior to the commencement of the six groups (pre-interview) and another interview once the six groups had ended (post-interview).

The writer then made an appointment with each of the practitioners for the pre-interview. ASHA's Elizabeth Resource Centre in Klipspruit was chosen as it was the most convenient site for all concerned. The cost of transport for the pre- and post-interviews, as well as for the six groups, was covered by the writer. The prospective participants were assured that their participation in this study was voluntary and in no way affected their involvement in the Impilo Pilot Project.

2.3.1.2 Description Of Participants

Of the six participants, five live and work in Soweto, four in Pimville, and one in Protea South. The sixth participant lives and works in Eldorado Park. The women range in age from 43 to 59. All of them are mothers and four of them are grandmothers. Two of the participants reported being widows.

Two of the participants left high school in Standard 8 (Grade 10) and the remaining four completed Standard 9 (Grade 11). Sabrina, the participant with the longest involvement in educare, has been involved in the field for eight years; Flora, for six years; Minnie, for five years; Lily, for two years; and Mabel, for one and a half years. Nomvula was in the first year of her involvement in the educare field. She was the only participant in the group who was not a member of Impilo. She had applied to be incorporated into Impilo and was waiting to have her centre visited by one of Impilo's District Development Officers (DDO's) to assess whether it fit the criteria for her to be included in the project. (The names of the participants have been changed to protect their anonymity.)

All of the participants in the study refer to themselves as the 'principals' of their centres. This definition has none of the formality conventionally associated with the job of principal. Their use of the term 'principal' is meant to communicate that they are the heads of their facilities and are responsible for the running of them. However, on a daily basis, these principals also function as teachers. In fact, an accurate analogy would be that of 'Head of Department' - a teacher who is in authority over several others - but who is herself a teacher. . Five of the six participants run facilities from their homes, which they refer to as their 'centres', 'crèches', 'pre-schools', 'daycare centres', etc. Only one of the participants has a daycare facility based outside of her home. It has been set up in the hall adjacent to a church in Eldorado Park and the daycare centre has access to the church itself, which it uses for its stage, among other facilities provided by the church, including a van in which many of the children are transported home.

None of the participants in this study have received formal training in ECD. Each of them has, however, attempted to undergo any training that would assist her in understanding the world of the child and, in so doing, in providing an adequate environment in which to promote the development of the children in her care. This training includes, in the first instance, the training that the participants are receiving on an ongoing basis through the Impilo Pilot Project. In addition to this, the participants, in their individual capacities, have, over the past few years, attended courses including the following: refresher courses run by the Department of Health, basic courses in ECD offered by Roodepoort

Technicon, Child Abuse courses, courses in pre-school education run by the Salvation Army and courses in pre-school education offered at the Olga Dube Training Centre in Soweto.

Five out of the six participants reported that their decision to open daycare facilities was influenced by their losing their previous jobs. Their previous employment included jobs as nursing assistants, tea ladies, cashiers and sales assistants. One participant reported having worked in the ANC on local government issues. Once unemployed, the participants found it very difficult to find alternative employment. At the same time, they began to realise that there was widespread need for daycare facilities in their areas, which motivated them to set up these types of services.

At the time of the Work Discussion Seminars, each of the participants had between 15 and 44 children in her facility, between the ages of 0-6. All of the participants had assistants upon whom they were dependent for the smooth running of their centres. Some of these assistants were paid, but some of the participants who could not afford to pay received assistance in the form of parent volunteers. They expressed ambivalence about the assistance provided by parents, without whom they could not cope, on the one hand, but whose presence was often also felt as intrusive or restricting, on the other. Most of the participants charged between R100-R150 per child per month. However, all of them acknowledged having children in their facilities whose parents could not afford to pay fees. Nomvula reported that the children in her centre were all non-paying. She said that parents assisted her by bringing a loaf of bread or a bag of mielie meal when they were able to.

The participants spoke of other difficulties that they face in the daily running of their centres. Because of the proximity of the Christmas holidays, the problem that was on all of their minds was the fact that parents take their children out of school in December, rather than pay a full month's fees for only 10 days' worth of school. The participants found it difficult to explain to parents that the costs of keeping the daycare centres open still needed to be covered for the whole month of December. In fact, fluctuating numbers of children are a perpetual problem encountered by the participants. In addition to this, they described their involvement in Impilo as a 'mixed blessing': they reported parents querying 'high' fees and said that parents were often doubtful of the fact that Impilo funds were only used to upgrade the facilities of the centres and not for the personal profit of the practitioners.

Despite the difficulties that each participant faces - including financial difficulties, difficulties with parents and a lack of training - each of them displays a deep sense of commitment to the field of ECD

and seems to be gratified by her work and contact with children. Each of the participants, in her own way, expresses an intuitive understanding of children. The participants' descriptions of the children with whom they work are sensitive, animated and imbued with a genuine sense of intimacy and concern.

2.3.2 Intervention And Assessment Procedure

Prior to the commencement of the Work Discussion Groups, each of the participants was interviewed. This interview is referred to as the 'pre-interview' throughout this study. The participants were given the following scenario to analyse:

> Thando is a 4 year-old little girl. She is brought to school each day by her mother. When she arrives she is very happy to see you. In fact, she follows you around all day. She seems to want you all to herself and gets upset and angry when you talk to the other children or when they talk to you. She sits next to you and is very clingy. She also has one particular toy which she clings to all day and she doesn't allow the other children to touch it. If a child indicates that he/she wants to play with this toy, Thando gets extremely angry and sometimes even hits some of the children who ask her to share this toy with them. This aggressive behaviour of hers is quite new - she didn't used to behave in this way. She has begun to wet herself - something she also hasn't done in a long time.

The participants were required to offer ideas as to how they might handle a child like this, what they would be thinking about in relation to this child, how they would feel in a situation such as this and how they might talk about this particular child with their colleagues. The pre-interview of each of the six participants was tape-recorded for analysis at a later stage. The participants were asked to sign a consent form indicating that they were prepared to have their responses taped.

The six Work Discussion Seminars followed. They took place once a week for six weeks and were each an hour long. All of the six seminars were video-recorded. The participants consented to the video-recordings of the seminars. A stipulation was made by the Impilo Pilot Project that the Work Discussion Seminars take place in the afternoon so that the participants would not be away from their centres in the mornings, when most learning takes place. This stipulation was respected.

On completion of the six Work Discussion Seminars, each participant was interviewed for a second time. This interview is referred to as the post-interview. The participants were given the following scenario, similar to that given in the pre-interview, to consider:

> Sifiso is a 4 year-old little boy. He is usually brought to crèche by his mother. Sometimes his aunt (or grandmother) brings him to school. He always brings something from home on these days. Usually it is food, like an apple or Simba chips, but sometimes he brings a little toy with him. The other children are curious to see what he has brought - but he is very reluctant to show them and he often kicks and bites rather than show them what he has brought. You have noticed that on the days that Sifiso's aunt (or grandmother) brings him, he is very weepy and nothing you do seems to comfort him. He also finds it hard to fall asleep and seems to eat more than usual.

The participants were required to consider this scenario in the same manner as that in which they had considered the pre-interview scenario and their responses were tape-recorded for analysis.

2.4 Research Design

The research design employed in this study is based on qualitative research principles.

'Qualitative research' is a term which has come to describe research concerned with knowledge building rather than knowledge discovery. Such research seeks to illustrate and describe situations rather than explain them through theories and hypotheses. Qualitative research is as concerned with the research process and what happens during the research process in terms of interactions between the researcher and the researched, as it is with the product of the research. In this sense, the understandings and misunderstandings which form and reform during the research process are part of the research findings and not merely the means to an end research product (Heron, 1981, in Smythe, 1996).

Another key characteristic of qualitative research is that it is inductive. Researchers develop concepts, and understandings from patterns in the data, rather than collect data to assess preconceived models, hypotheses or theories (Taylor and Bogdan, 1984, in Smythe). While it is generally accepted that in qualitative research, questions are formed and may change as the research proceeds, the area of study and the initial focus of inquiry are nearly always embedded in what Ely et al (1991) refer to as the researcher's "deepest professional and personal commitments" (in Smythe, 1996). Thus the researcher does not go into the field a blank slate, but nor does he/she attempt to prove or disprove a theory. At the completion of his/her work, the qualitative researcher offers a bed of data, along with his/her interpretations of that data, which can contribute to alternative or multiple ways of seeing the world (Smythe, 1996).

One of the most important aspects of qualitative research is its concern with context. Qualitative research views experience holistically, as researchers explore all aspects of an experience. As individuals explore human situations they must attend to the variety of factors which shape them. The connections which tie experiences together and often provide their significance in human affairs are essential features of holistic qualitative research.

Another common aspect of qualitative research involves the idea of making judgments. The function of this appraising aspect of qualitative research is to describe the essential qualities of events, to interpret the meanings of and relationships among those events, and to appraise the significance of those events in the larger picture of social and educational concerns (Kincheloe, 1991).

Qualitative research offers sociologists and others distinctive opportunities to develop analytic perspectives that speak directly to the practical circumstances and processes of everyday life (Miller, 1997).

The series of Work Discussion Groups run for the purposes of this study formed the basis of an action research, a means by which the childcare workers could reflect on their practice and thus deepen their intuitive understanding of their teaching practice (Lomax, 1986; in Colyn and Breen 1989). Lewin stresses the limitations of studying complex, real social events in a laboratory and artificially splitting out single behavioural elements from an integrated system. He notes the advantages of understanding the dynamic nature of change by studying it under controlled conditions as it takes place. He emphasises the client problem-solving change characteristics of action research in natural settings with conditions sufficiently amenable to scientific observation and control that lead to an understanding of the laws which govern the nature of the phenomena under study (in Foster, 1972).

The Tavistock has developed a stream of action research which is an integrative psychoanalytical, social science approach which centres on the solution of social as distinct from individual problems. The main theme is the need to get collaboration from members of an organisation while attempting to help them solve their own problems.

Rapoport (1970) defines action research as a type of applied social research differing from other varieties in the immediacy of the researcher's involvement in the action process. It aims to contribute

both to the practical concerns of people in an immediate problematic situation and to the goals of social science by joint collaboration with a mutually acceptable ethical framework (in Foster, 1972).

Typically a study proceeds by establishing a collaborative relationship and by collecting and feeding back data as the study proceeds. Changes in interpersonal relationships, as well as modifications of role and goal structure, are sought. While most social scientists would like to make a difference in discovering the determining conditions of events (ie: causal research), more often than not they have to content themselves with describing the world as it is and discovering correlated terms (ie: descriptive research). Some are less concerned with how immediately apparent it is that their research has utility outside the scientific community; others see action research as an outlet where it is possible to make a difference both in respect of knowledge as well as social utility (Foster, 1972).

2.5 Data Analysis

In light of the above, the tape-recorded pre- and post-interviews, as well as the video-recorded sessions, were listened to and watched several times and, finally, transcribed by the writer. This was done in order to become familiar with the material raised in the sessions and with the ways in which the participants contributed to the sessions. Each participant's development throughout the series of Work Discussion Seminars was analysed. In addition, their responses to the pre- and post-interview scenarios were analysed and compared with one another, to see if any shifts in understanding had occurred.

The following points provided the basis upon which the pre- and post-interviews, as well as the process and content of the Work Discussion Seminars, were analysed:

- The extent to which each participant was able to link the child's current problem with his/her life history.
- The extent to which each participant was able to link external behaviours with possible internal conflicts/phantasies of the child, demonstrating an understanding of the belief that behaviour is an external manifestation of internal conflict (ie. a shift in their understanding that behaviour can be symbolic).
- The way in which each participant was able to describe and use her own emotional responses (ie. counter-transference) as a means of understanding the child concerned (as distinct from emotions of her own that might prevent her from responding appropriately to the child's needs).

In keeping with the process-based approach of qualitative research, which never looks to a final 'product' to confirm or disprove the efficacy of a certain approach, as much emphasis was placed on analysing the discussion which ensued in the Work Discussion Seminars themselves as they progressed, as was placed on the responses to the post-interview, as a marker of potential shifts in thought, approach or awareness.

In addition to the above, each participant was asked to provide feedback in an informal questionnaire which asked the participants the following questions:

1. What did you find helpful about the six groups?
2. In what way could the groups have been more helpful to you?
3. Further comments/suggestions.

Feedback was also given during the course of the Work Discussion Seminars by the participants. The provision of feedback was encouraged by the seminar leader and the writer as an indication of whether the participants' needs and expectations of the Work Discussion Seminars were being met.

This is discussed in Chapter 4.

CHAPTER 3: SUMMARY REPORT OF THE WORK DISCUSSION SEMINARS

3.1 Overview

In the following accounts of the discussions raised in the six Work Discussion Seminars run for the purposes of this study, four vignettes have been selected from the vast material gathered. They reflect some of the topics and themes raised in the discussions. In general, topics included: childhood aggression, possessiveness, issues related to food, school readiness, identifying difficulties (including possible learning and speech difficulties), the impact of early childhood memories and experiences on current behaviour, physical and sexual abuse and teacher 'burnout'. (A more complete account of each seminar is contained in Appendix 1, which is based upon the transcriptions made of each session, from the video-recorded material.)

Each vignette is described below and is followed by a brief discussion which relates to the theories and possible explanations (embedded in psychoanalytically-informed thinking) that the seminar leader and writer had in mind at the time of the discussions. These were not shared with the participants in theoretical terms, but provided the basis for any suggestion or explanation offered.

3.2 First Vignette

3.2.1 Description

In the first session, Nomvula informs the group that the children attending her crèche attend free of charge because their parents cannot afford to pay. The other participants react with concern at this and the atmosphere in the group is filled with a sense of the pain and suffering with which the participants come into contact on a daily basis. The seminar leader comments that the participants seem concerned about how Nomvula manages on a day-to-day basis. Sabrina informs the group that there are children in her crèche who also attend free of charge, but that the paying children compensate for this.

The writer comments that looking after children in good circumstances is a difficult task, and that it is made all the more difficult when one has to contend with all the worries to which the participants are exposed.

Minnie tells the group that one of the problems she encounters is that of children who come to her house on weekends and ask to sleep over. The seminar leader talks about how difficult it is to set boundaries. She acknowledges that it must be more difficult for people who run daycare centres in their

home and who find it difficult to refuse a child as a result. (The seminar leader is careful to inquire whether it is culturally acceptable for the participants to allow children to stay over in their homes, mindful of the concept of Ubuntu, which is based on a sense of community, implying that there is a duty to care for anyone who is needy. By so doing, she leaves room for participants who may not see this issue as problematic.)

The participants then talk among themselves about children who arrive very early in the morning and leave late in the evening and about what a long day this is for them. The seminar leader asks the participants how they feel at the end of such a long day. Minnie responds that they do not have an alternative and do what they can "for the sake of the children". The seminar leader points out that even if they have no alternative, there must be a feeling about this situation.

3.2.2 Discussion

Behind the question about how the participants feel after such a long day is the idea that the participants can be made aware that they are entitled to feel angry, irritable, burdened, etc, not towards the children, but with the situation in which they find themselves. The idea is to help them recognise and identify how they might be feeling and to give them the opportunity of articulating this in the group, if they so wish. Talking about this type of burden, it is thought, would bring about a sense of relief in that each participant might find support and empathy in the group. The situation itself would not be changed, but the resources on which the participants are able to draw in order to cope with such demands, have the opportunity of being enriched by talking about how such demands make them feel.

The question has its roots in one of the aims of the Work Discussion Seminars: beginning to explore and deal with the feelings and emotions that work with children evokes in the participants – their counter-transference feelings. The question is rooted in the belief that if the participants are aware of their own counter-transference feelings - in this case, how they feel at the end of a long day when a child has still not been fetched and requires looking after - they will be able to distinguish between appropriate and inappropriate handling of the child. In other words, if, for example, a participant finds a child particularly demanding at the end of a day, talking about it in the group might reveal to her that because she is angry with the parents for being late, she might be 'taking this anger out' on the child. Another explanation might be that the child seems more demanding because the participant has less energy. Alternatively, the child might, indeed, be more needy and demanding because he/she is worried about being fetched at such a late hour. Talking about such a seemingly minor detail yields a whole

range of possible scenarios which serve to enrich the participants' understandings of the ways in which they feel and respond emotionally to certain situations and how these determine the ways in which they react to the children in their care; not least how the children might be feeling themselves.

The seminar leader acknowledges that it seems that the difficult situations in which the participants find themselves had to be spoken about before the group could move on to talking about individual children and the difficulties that they pose. In this light, Session 1 of the six-session series of Work Discussion Seminars serves as a container for the emotions and difficulties of the participants themselves. The seminar leader and the writer have provided an experience for the participants of being 'held', 'contained' and supported. Through the experience of being thought about by the seminar leader and the writer - the participants' caretakers - the participants are now more able, themselves, to think about the children in their care. (The seminar leader's thinking in this instance is based on discussions presented by theorists such as Rustin (1989) and McFadyen (1991), referred to in the Literature Review, above.)

3.3 Second Vignette

3.3.1 Description

At the beginning of Session 2, Minnie shares the case of Masibulele, a three-year-old boy in her crèche, whom she describes as very active, inquisitive and as perpetually asking questions. He arrives at 5:40 in the morning and asks Minnie for food before she puts him to sleep until crèche begins. Minnie says that Masibulele is intelligent and advanced for his age. She describes him as very sensitive, particularly to his parents' fighting. Masibulele has asked Minnie why his father beats his mo[illegible]nd he is subdued at crèche on the days following a fight between his parents. Minnie says that she did not know how to answer Masibulele's question and told him that his parents were playing. Masibulele would not accept this answer and said that he knew his parents were not playing because his mother was crying.

Flora shares the case of a child in her centre whose parents also fight with each other. She says that when the child comes to school on the day following the fighting, he spends the day boxing the other children - "to show that he is still angry inside". The seminar leader highlights the differences between the way in which the two children deal with their parents' fighting. She points out that the child in Flora's creche seems to come to school "full of the fighting" and his boxing is a way for him to get rid of the feeling and to pass it on to somebody else. She says that perhaps Masibulele's question-asking also has the function of passing on or getting rid of the bad feelings. She explains that it is important for

these children to have a container to take in their feelings and help them make sense of them. Flora's child does not talk about his feelings, he "boxes them out". He is both imitating what he sees and trying to get rid of the feeling into someone else. Masibulele's question-asking might be an attempt to have Minnie make sense of the world for him.

The seminar leader suggests that Flora might say something to the child to help him understand what he is doing when he fights, possibly something like, "Maybe thinking about fighting is making you fight as well." The seminar leader adds how important it is for Masibulele to feel that Minnie is listening and trying to understand. She acknowledges that this will not stop the parents' fighting, but listening and talking to a child can help him/her to understand what the fighting does to his/her feelings and to his/her behaviour.

3.3.2 Discussion

The term "projection" was not used in this instance, although it was in the mind of the seminar leader and formed the basis of her explanations. Projection may be understood as "... the earliest actions of the ego ... to minimise its fear and distress. Specific defences are deployed to distance the aggression, and these primitive defence mechanisms are phantasies of projecting out of the self aggressive impulses and dangerous objects" (Hinshelwood, Robinson and Zarate, 1997, p. 115). In this light, the idea that the child, by boxing, was trying to "box out" or to rid himself of the fighting feelings was communicated to the participants in an attempt to begin to look for the meaning underlying his behaviour. Similarly, the seminar leader explained that the question-asking could be seen as an alternative means of ridding the child of unpleasant feelings, as well as an attempt on his part to try and make sense of the world.

3.4 Third Vignette

3.4.1 Description

In the fourth session, Sabrina raises her concerns about her two-year-old nephew, Savio. He attends crèche in her centre. Whenever a stranger comes into the crèche, Savio turns his back or hides. At first this behaviour was not taken too seriously, but it has begun to worry Sabrina. When the police were invited to her crèche to speak to the children, Savio hid under the table. One of Sabrina's assistants dragged him out from under the table, but he screamed and hid behind her dress. This kind of behaviour has manifested itself at home, too. Whenever a particular friend of Sabrina comes to visit, Savio shields his face from her.

The seminar leader remarks that Savio seems to have a powerful anxiety related to strangers. Sabrina says that she is worried about why such a young child would behave in this way. Minnie asks whether Sabrina has recently spoken to the children in her crèche about safety measures. The seminar leader extends this question by saying that this sometimes causes one or two of the children to feel anxious. Sabrina answers that she has not.

Sabrina informs the group that Savio was born with clubbed feet, but that he is walking normally now, having undergone an operation at nine months of age. The seminar leader says that this might have been a traumatic experience for him, having had a lot of strangers who came and hurt him. Sabrina wonders whether he could still remember all that.

The seminar leader reflects that Savio had a difficult beginning as a baby, having undergone an operation. She asks each of the participants what her earliest memory is and each participant shares an early memory with the rest of the group. The seminar leader explains that the reason she tried to elicit memories is because she is trying to think about Savio and whether having an operation at nine months and some memory of being afraid of strangers, has stayed in his mind. She continues that he might not, even when he is older, be able to say, "I remember that happened," but explains that one has memories in feelings. She refers to the memories that the participants shared and points out how almost everybody remembered an incident that was unpleasant for her, indicating that difficult things often stay in one's mind. In this light, the seminar leader says that she is wondering whether Savio's operation might have had an effect on him. She adds that one is not overly concerned if a child of Savio's age is shy, but acknowledges that Sabrina, who knows him very well, thinks that his behaviour is worthy of concern.

The seminar leader suggests that somebody talk to Savio at a time when he is not frightened and say something like, "I know you seemed to get a bit frightened" or "I noticed when X came you were so scared." This would serve the function of communicating to him that the adults are trying to understand why he is frightened, in addition to helping him to understand what frightens him, by putting his fears into words. The seminar leader emphasises that when a child knows that he is being thought about, that is already helpful to him.

Sabrina repeats her confusion at why Savio is scared of the neighbour (Sophia), especially since she is not a stranger to him. Flora asks whether Sophia has a gruff voice. Sabrina replies that Sophia has a loud voice and that Savio might be frightened of it. She says that she has never thought of this. The seminar leader comments that this is an interesting point and one of the benefits of talking in a group, because when people are accustomed to things, it is useful to have a different eye.

In the following session, Sabrina reports back on Savio. She informs the group that she spoke to Sophia (the neighbour) and asked her when she next saw Savio to approach him very gently and speak to him softly. Over the next few days they devised a desensitising exercise, which proved very successful, and by the end of the week, Savio finally allowed Sophia to pick him up.

Sabrina also spoke to her brother about Savio's fears. He informed her that the family uses an expression, "Oupa Doelie is going to eat you up." Oupa Doelie is a character similar to the Bogey Man and is used to deter Savio from doing certain things or to encourage him to do others. Mabel adds that when children are naughty, adults often say they are going to call the police. She suggests that this could explain Savio's fear of the police. The participants agree that Savio's family needs to stop using the Oupa Doelie tactic and Sabrina says that she said as much to her brother. The seminar leader comments that some children become frightened at things like Oupa Doelie or the Bogey Man and others do not. She says that when a child is particularly sensitive, one has to be careful, but adds that this type of 'warning' should not be used in any event.

3.4.2 Discussion

Towards the end of the six-session series of Work Discussion Seminars, the participants became more confident and imaginative in their comments. In her feedback in the fifth session, it is apparent that the practical nature of the suggestions made by the participants during session 4 in response to Savio's fears, made sense to Sabrina, who decided to act on them. In addition several participants referred to discussing the group content with their staff after each meeting. Lily said, "We do the meetings again," implying that she was trying out the model of talking together.

3 5 Fourth Vignette

3.5.1 Description

Flora tells the group about the daughter of a cousin of hers, who has a child in her crèche. Her cousin feeds her child before she goes to work at 6 o'clock in the morning. When she comes to fetch her child

after work in the afternoons, she brings food for him without inquiring whether he has eaten. She once gave her child a whole bunch of bananas. Flora says that she is scared that the child will vomit. Both Flora and Lily add that most parents ask their children, when they fetch them, if they have eaten. Lily admits that this often makes her feel uneasy, as it implies that she might not be taking proper care of the child.

The writer comments that food seems to have another meaning – both for teachers and for parents - that it symbolises something. The writer refers to the child in Flora's crèche and explains that she was thinking about why mothers come home from work and feel the need to give their children food. Lily says that perhaps mothers are afraid that their children are not being fed well enough at crèche. Mabel adds that when a child comes home, even though he/she may not be hungry, he/she enjoys eating something "from home". The seminar leader reflects that "home food" seems to have a very special meaning attached to it. She proposes that it might have something to do with the child's mother and his/her mother making it. The writer reminds the group of Anna, a child in Mabel's crèche, who arrives in the mornings holding an apple or packet of crisps in her hand. She asks the group to think about why Flora's cousin gives her child a bunch of bananas when she knows he has already eaten.

The seminar leader asks the group members if they think it is possible that parents might think that because their children are not with them, they are missing something else; not just food for their stomachs, but 'food' for their 'hearts'. The writer adds that Flora's cousin, who goes to work early in the morning and comes back quite late in the evening, might feel that somebody else is looking after her baby, taking him to the toilet, playing with him, educating him, and she feels as though she has not been able to do that for her child during the day. This way of thinking seems as if it is beginning to make sense to Mabel, who says that the mother "closes the gap with food." The seminar leader continues that from the moment babies are born, right from the beginning, food and love are intertwined. The participants nod in agreement.

The writer reminds the group of Masibulele, the child in Minnie's crèche, who eats a lot. She suggests that perhaps when he does not feel secure or comfortable inside, he gets those kinds of feelings from his food. Minnie is unfamiliar with this kind of thinking and seems to find it difficult to relate the discussion of what food may symbolise with Masibulele's overeating. The seminar leader comments that perhaps Masibulele is hungry for attention. Minnie says that she is not sure, but adds that if Masibulele is given food when he arrives in the morning, he goes to sleep, whereas he cries and fusses

if he is not. The seminar leader suggests that Minnie try to sit with Masibulele in the mornings, rather than feed him. Sitting with him once will not lead to an immediate change, but over time it might, especially if Masibulele is hungry for attention. She refers to the expression 'comfort eating' and points out that many people eat when they are miserable and find this comforting. She explains that often appetite is an indication of some feelings inside.

The seminar leader points out that one must, of course, check that the child is being fed properly at home before one tries to ascribe some underlying meaning to his eating. The writer says that if one is able to rule out physical hunger and worms, then one might think that Masibulele is hungry for attention. Perhaps if Minnie is able to spend 10 minutes alone with him from time to time, the attention he receives might fill up the hole inside him in the same way that a packet of crisps seems to do.

3.5.2 Discussion

In this vignette, taken from the last session, there is some openness to the suggestion that food might have a symbolic meaning. This is evidenced in Mabel's comment, "they close the gap with food". The impact of separation from the mother was discussed in relation to other cases brought earlier in the series of seminars and which were relevant to this discussion as well.

It must be borne in mind that a discussion on the symbolic meanings of food is not easily integrated into the thinking of women who frequently face situations in which they are concerned about whether they will have enough food to feed the children in their care. Despite this, the seminar leader and the writer were able to guide the discussion in a direction in which the participants were beginning to think imaginatively and symbolically – rather than concretely – about the issues of food, feeding and eating. The seminar leader's comment that from the moment babies are born, food and love are intertwined, resonated for all the participants.

The seminar leader felt that it was no coincidence and therefore of significance that the food theme made itself apparent in the final session: she felt that it was symbolic of the participants' 'hunger' for more 'food for their hearts' in the form of containment and attention provided by the Work Discussion Seminars, not to mention 'food for thought' in the form of the newly unfolding understandings and practical problem-solving that had become a feature of the groups over the course of the six sessions.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

The progress of each participant in the series of Work Discussion Seminars is discussed below in order to assess the benefit, for her, of having taken part in the Work Discussion Seminars, and to assess the contribution that psychoanalytically informed thinking has to make to the field of ECD in South Africa.

Each participant's progress is discussed, separately, by referring to shifts in thinking reflected in the following areas:

i) her responses to the pre- as compared with the post-interview scenarios;
ii) her participation in and feedback given during the course of the Work Discussion Seminars;
iii) her comments in the informal evaluation done at the end of the six sessions.

Within these three broad areas, the progress of each participant will be assessed by her ability to:

a) demonstrate a deeper understanding of the mind of the child by taking into account the child's early history;
b) grapple with the idea that behaviour and play can be symbolic and can provide clues to understanding a child;
c) explore and deal with the emotions that work with children evokes in her (ie: counter-transference).

4.1 Sabrina

4.1.1 Comparison Between Responses To Pre- And Post-Interview Scenarios

a) In her responses to the pre-interview scenario, Sabrina demonstrated an understanding of the effect that a child's background history can have on him. In trying to explain the possible causes for Thando's sudden change of behaviour Sabrina listed the following: parental fighting, the birth of a new baby and a consequent desire for more attention from mother, and the possibility that Thando might be experiencing problems at school, including being bullied by one of the other children.

In the post-interview, Sabrina demonstrated a similar understanding of the effect of a child's background history on his functioning. She provided the example of a lack of a fixed routine, illustrated in the post-interview scenario by Sifiso's being brought to school by mother, aunt or grandmother. In providing this example, she said, "... like we usually said in the classes [Work Discussion Seminars]." Here she was referring to cases discussed in the course of the six

sessions which focused on children who experienced feelings of insecurity as a result of having to move and live with different family members because of various difficulties that parents were trying to address.

In both the pre- and post-interviews, Sabrina demonstrated an intuitive understanding of the ways in which children are affected emotionally by both home and school. In the post-interview, she emphasised the importance of observing the child, "watching him, noticing his problem". Observation is something that was stressed in the Work Discussion Seminars, as part of the process of gaining a deeper insight into a child's difficulties. There is a reference, in this comment of Sabrina's, to discussions held in the seminars.

b) In the pre-interview, Sabrina demonstrated an understanding of the idea that play can be symbolic. This is reflected in her comment, "... in the play corner, usually you get out a lot from them ... you can actually see what is going on ... and maybe in a creative work ..."

In the post-interview, the idea that eating may be symbolic of an underlying emotional difficulty seems to have made sense to Sabrina. She spoke about a child in her crèche who began eating a lot and compared him to Sifiso, the child in the post-interview scenario. Her comment was, "Like you said the last time [in the sixth session of Work Discussion Seminars], maybe it's because he needs that filling up, the mother hasn't got time for him, the father hasn't got time, there's always struggling and fighting... and he had to fill it up with the eating."

c) In the pre-interview scenario, Sabrina acknowledged that a clingy child, like Thando, would make her feel frustrated, because she "wouldn't be free to do whatever [she is] supposed to do."

In the post-interview scenario, Sabrina acknowledged that it is very "painful" when a child can not be comforted and that it makes her feel "helpless". In fact, during the course of the Work Discussion Seminars, Sabrina admitted to feeling "defeated" by Lincoln, a six-year-old boy in her centre, with whom she felt she had made no progress.

Sabrina seemed to have been one of the most insightful of the six participants. This perception could be due to the fact that her fluency in English, which is superior to that of the rest of the participants, aided her in expressing her thoughts more articulately. In her case, development

seems to have taken place in the quality and depth of her perceptions, which strengthened her intuitive understandings of children's functioning.

4.1.2 Participation In The Work Discussion Seminars

Sabrina was an active, vocal participant. She was able to talk openly about her concerns with regard to various children in her care, as mentioned above. She also acted upon suggestions made, as is seen in the third vignette, above.

Sabrina made use of all the time offered her by the framework of the block of Work Discussion Seminars. She took advantage of the opportunity to talk to her colleagues, on an informal level, in the few minutes that were used for refreshments before the commencement of each session. During this time, Sabrina spoke about the fact that she had suffered from 'burnout' during the previous year and had had to be hospitalised for exhaustion. She seemed to appreciate the concern and empathy shown her by the rest of the participants, as well as by the seminar leader and the writer.

4.1.3 Evaluation

In Sabrina's evaluation of the six Work Discussion Seminars, she wrote that she found the following helpful:

- "The fact that I could open up to others who are in the same shoes as I;"
- "Not holding back any problem I experienced with some children;"
- "Knowing the others understood what I was trying to say;"
- "Helpful feedback, encouragement and new ideas about how to get to the root of a child's problem;"
- "How to see things here and now and not distance any problem."

Sabrina said that the groups could have been more helpful if there had been more opportunity to talk about ways in which to foster better parent involvement.

Asked for further comments or suggestions, Sabrina expressed the hope that the groups could continue in order to "let off some steam", as well as to give participants a chance to put in practice what they had learned in the group.

4.2 Flora

4.2.1 Comparison Between Responses To Pre- And Post-Interview Scenarios

a) In the pre-interview, in terms of the effects that a child's background history may have on his behaviour, Flora thought that a possible cause for Thando's aggression might be violence in the home, including abuse. She said, "...and then when the child is in the crèche, he is remembering what is happening at home." She suggested that another cause for the development of aggression might be that the child "is not normal from birth" or a "slow learner". She could not seem to make links between how a child might be feeling emotionally and the way in which this manifests in behaviour.

In the post-interview, Flora's understanding of Sifiso's behaviour was reflected in the following comments: "It seems as if Sifiso is worried about something"; "Maybe his mother left him, he's worried about the mother. Maybe the mother doesn't stay with him ... Maybe he's missing some parent, maybe he doesn't stay with the father and mother together and then that's why he's feeling bad inside ... Maybe at home, they've got no patience for him ... Children like to ask, they like to play with things and the parents ... want to make them sit still." In these responses, it is evident that Flora was drawing upon a wider range of possibilities for a child's distress, none of which is something outside of her daily experience, but all of which seem to have been brought into conscious thought by the experience of having discussed their impact in the seminars.

b) In the pre-interview, Flora did not demonstrate any familiarity with the idea that play/behaviour can be symbolic. She did, however, refer to the idea that children might find expression for their anger, aggression or other emotions through play, and referred to playing with play-dough as an example of how a child may experience relief of these emotions.

In the post-interview, the idea that eating may be symbolic of an underlying emotional difficulty seemed to have started to become part of Flora's thinking: "The child who eats too much sometimes got a problem at home." This type of thinking, however, was still in its infancy, and needed time and further elaboration through discussion in order for the understanding to inform the way in which Flora might handle a child who overeats. In the post-interview, she still spoke about trying to get the child to share food, taking food away and giving a child the same amount

to eat as the rest of the children, and not about trying to understand the meaning behind the overeating, and addressing this in the child concerned.

c) In the pre-interview, Flora said that she "wouldn't mind" Thando's clingy behaviour because she "like[s] children." She would try to keep the child occupied when she was busy. She stressed that "There must be this love between you and this child."

In the post-interview, Flora acknowledged that she would feel "miserable" about Sifiso's inability to be comforted. She added that "it's too much work when a child is crying, it makes you feel bad." Perhaps the difference between this response and the one in the pre-interview can be attributed to Flora's concern to be seen as a "good teacher" in the pre-interview, before she had had the experience of being allowed to express her emotions in the confines of a Work Discussion Seminar. After hearing her colleagues express their difficulties to one another in the containing environment of the seminars, Flora felt more able to acknowledge how she would feel.

4.2.2 Participation In The Work Discussion Seminars

Flora was an active presence in the seminars. She seemed to listen attentively and think deeply about what was being discussed. She often came up with very practical suggestions, which proved helpful to the Participants. An example is given in the third vignette above, in which Flora asked whether Sabrina's neighbour had a loud voice, which led to an understanding of why two-year-old Savio might have been afraid of her.

4.2.3 Evaluation

Flora said that she found it helpful to discuss the problems she encountered with the rest of the group because they seemed to encounter the same kinds of difficulties. She added that the groups had been helpful in helping her to "notice the mistakes that I did before so that I must not do them again." Flora did not provide any suggestions as to ways in which the groups could have been more helpful to her. She expressed a wish for the groups to continue.

4.3 Lily

4.3.1 Comparison Between Responses To Pre- And Post-Interview Scenarios

a) In the pre-interview, Lily demonstrated an understanding that a child's background history may affect his functioning. In her explanation of the possible causes of Thando's unwillingness to share, Lily suggested that Thando might be an only child, and therefore unused to the idea of having to share with other children. She thought that Thando's aggressive behaviour might stem from jealousy at having to share the teacher with the other children.

In the post-interview, Lily did not bring any more insight to bear upon the ways in which a child's background may affect his functioning. Her approach was more in the realm of practical steps to be taken to stop a certain manifestation of behaviour, rather than a consideration of the links that can be made between behaviour and experience (internal and external), emphasised in the seminars.

b) It was evident, in the pre-interview, that the idea that play can be symbolic is a notion which was totally unfamiliar to Lily.

In the post-interview, despite having dealt with this idea in the seminars, it was still obvious that the short series of Work Discussion Seminars was not sufficient for Lily to begin to integrate this new way of thinking in a meaningful way. She related to giving a child food as a means of keeping him quiet, as a distraction used by adults, in part, for their own convenience.

c) In the pre-interview, Lily acknowledged that a clingy child like Thando would make her feel a "little bit bad ... I don't think I will feel all right."

In the post-interview, Lily's response as to how a child like Sifiso would make her feel, was similar to the above. She added that she would try to spend time with the child and give him some individual attention. Giving a child individual attention was something that was emphasised in the seminars. Lily seemed more able to benefit from practical suggestions than to benefit from insights of an emotional nature.

4.3.2 Participation In The Work Discussion Seminars

Lily seemed to be the participant most resistant to the ways of thinking introduced in the seminars. Her resistance was not an aggressive or argumentative one. She participated vocally in the seminars, but seemed to have less capacity to think about underlying issues or to make use of links made, in all but a relatively superficial manner. In discussing a child who was experiencing difficulties in Lily's crèche, Mabel suggested that the problem might be explained by the child's desire for attention from the mother. Lily replied that that would explain the child's difficult behaviour at home, but did not have anything to do with what happened in the crèche. The seminar leader tried to explain that difficulties experienced in the home could be replicated by circumstances in the crèche, or at least exacerbated by them, and that problems can not be classified in terms of 'home problems' and 'school problems'. Lily did not display a lack of desire to expose herself to new ways of thinking and it is thought that, with time, her ability to embrace the types of thinking encouraged in the group could be enhanced.

4.3.3 Evaluation

Lily found sharing ideas and providing one another with ways of resolving problems with children and parents helpful. She suggested that the groups could be of greater help were they to carry on, and said that she would benefit from visiting the centres of the other participants. She also expressed a wish to remain in permanent contact with the other participants.

In a further comment, Lily mentioned that after the group discussions she would "redo" what had been discussed with the assistants in her own centre.

4.4 Nomvula

4.4.1 *Comparison Between Responses To Pre- And Post-Interview Scenarios*

a) In her responses to the pre-interview scenario, Nomvula demonstrated an understanding of the effect that a child's background history can have on his functioning. This is reflected in the following comments: "Maybe she doesn't get enough love from her parents ... she's lonely, maybe she's a single child at home. Maybe she's got a single parent, sometimes children need both parents." Nomvula attributed Thando's aggression to possible aggression in the home, as well as to witnessing aggression on television.

In the post-interview, Nomvula demonstrated a similar understanding of the role of a child's background history. She suggested that Sifiso's aggression and "naughtiness" might be

explained by "a lack of mother's care, mother's love." She emphasised the need to compensate for this in the school by comforting him, talking to him and "making him realise the difference of love." This idea of hers was reinforced in the seminars, in cases when it was suggested that spending some individual time with particular children might be of benefit to them. Nomvula said that during the time she spent alone with Sifiso, she would play games with him, do puzzles and "talk a lot" to him, about not being aggressive, being "cool and polite" and being good. In the seminars, the participants were encouraged to try to use reflection with the children, in comments such as, "You seem cross today" or "Maybe when you see your parents fight it makes you want to fight." Nomvula did not seem to have reached this level of thinking about what she would say to a child.

b) In the pre-interview, Nomvula did not display any awareness of the idea that play or behaviour can be symbolic.

In the post-interview, Nomvula explained Sifiso's overeating as "a lack of internal love ... He needs the attention of his mother, so when the mother is not there, he eats a lot to fill that gap."

c) In the pre-interview, Nomvula said that a clingy child like Thando "makes me feel that I must have a lot of love to those children."

In the post-interview, Nomvula said, "It makes you sad, but you try by all means to comfort him even though you are sad." In this comment it seems that Nomvula has allowed herself to have an emotional response of her own to a child, instead of only responding "with love" to a child's needs. This is attributed to the experience of containment in the seminars, in which the participants' feelings were regarded as legitimate and important.

4.4.2 Participation In The Work Discussion Seminars

Nomvula was a quiet presence in the seminars. She seemed to listen carefully to what was being discussed and shared personal experiences when they were relevant to the case being discussed. For instance, a child in Lily's crèche who cried constantly was being discussed. Nomvula told the group that she was very shy as a young girl and that interaction with people used to make her cry. It seemed as if she identified with the child being discussed and wanted to use this as a means to understand her better.

In the final session, Nomvula spoke about a child in her crèche who was difficult. His mother volunteered in her centre, which complicated matters. Nomvula thought she had mishandled the situation and was apprehensive about exposing what she considered to be her mistakes. However, she was able to talk about this case in the confines of the group.

4.4.3 Evaluation

Nomvula found the opportunity to discuss problems and share ideas helpful. She found the fact that everybody seemed to face similar difficulties comforting. She said that she "discovered" new ways of solving difficulties.

Nomvula did not have suggestions about ways in which the groups could have been more helpful to her. She expressed a wish that the groups would continue.

4.5 Minnie

4.5.1 Comparison Between Responses To Pre- And Post-Interview Scenarios

a) In her responses to the pre-interview scenario, Minnie demonstrated an understanding of the effect that a child's background history can have on him, reflected in the following suggestions: "Maybe the child has been abused. Or maybe the child's not happy. Or maybe she is frightened." She added the possibility that there might be fighting in the home, or that Thando might be new to the crèche.

In the post-interview, Minnie demonstrates a similar understanding. She suggests that Sifiso has "a problem from home. Or maybe by changing those people who are bringing him to crèche ... he's not happy about the whole thing." Minnie's understanding of children's difficulties had developed to include the possibility that a seemingly minor detail, such as the lack of a routine, can affect a child. This insight developed as a result of discussion in the group, in which this particular problem was raised at least twice throughout the course of the seminars.

b) In the pre-interview, there was no indication that Minnie was familiar with the idea that play or behaviour can be symbolic.

In the post-interview, there was a slight indication that this type of thinking had been introduced to Minnie, illustrated in her comment, "Usually you find that when you've got problems, in

adults, I don't know in kids, you find that you are munching almost everything. Maybe eating that much he [Sifiso] is trying to suppress something." However, this type of thinking was only in its infancy and Minnie still relied on her 'tried and tested' explanations for overeating as being a "bad habit".

c) In the pre-interview, Minnie explained that a clingy child, like Thando, would make her feel "worried" and would encourage her to try and find out the cause of this behaviour.

In the post-interview, Minnie acknowledged that she would feel "terrible" and "depressed because it's a bad habit for a child of that age to behave in that manner." In a similar fashion to some of the other participants, Minnie seemed to be more aware that she is entitled to feel terrible or depressed and she was more in touch with the possible emotional effects that a particular child may have on her.

4.5.2 Participation In The Work Discussion Seminars

Minnie was an active and vocal participant. In the last session, in which the symbolism of food, eating and feeding was discussed, she seemed to struggle with the notion that eating could be indicative of an underlying emotional difficulty.

Minnie grappled with difficulties posed by caring for young children, including the issue of how to answer difficult questions. She focused more on the kinds of answers one could give a child, than on thinking about what excessive question-asking might mean or symbolise for a particular child.

4.5.3 Evaluation

Minnie said that talking about Masibulele in the group helped her to deal with him in her crèche. She appreciated the opportunity to "open up with individual obstacles." Minnie said that the group had provided ideas in cases "where one could not budge" and found the sharing of ideas beneficial. She added that getting to know the participants "has made me to grow more. This has made me and my staff to discuss personal difficulties freely."

Minnie did not comment on ways in which the groups could have been more helpful to her, but suggested that the group as a whole "go out into the community and help others", including the disabled and the aged.

4.6 Mabel

4.6.1 Comparison Between Responses To Pre- And Post-Interview Scenarios

a) In her responses to the pre-interview scenario, Mabel demonstrated an understanding of the effect that a child's background history can have on him. Her explanations for Thando's change in behaviour included the possibility that she might be an only child and not used to sharing with other children, and that there might be fighting at home.

In the post-interview, Mabel demonstrated a similar understanding of the influence of a child's background history. Her explanations for Sifiso's behaviour included the possibility that he may be disturbed by the change in routine when brought to school by his aunt or grandmother. This explanation arises out of discussions held in the seminars along similar lines.

b) In both the pre- and post-interviews, Mabel demonstrated an intuitive understanding of symbolisin. This was demonstrated in her understanding of the children's clingy behaviour; she explained that the children may think that she "resemble[s] the mother", that she stands in for the mother during crèche hours.

Mabel's responses to the post-interview scenario were disappointing in that this method of assessing the ways in which she had progressed as a result of the seminars was obviously not suited to her. She displayed none of the insight that she had displayed on a regular basis during the Work Discussion Seminars. This was particularly noticeable in the issues relating to Sifiso's bringing food with him to crèche and over-eating when miserable, in the post-interview scenario. Mabel did not comment on these issues, except in quite superficial ways, unlike her suggestions and insights during the sessions.

c) With regard to how a child like Thando or Sifiso would make Mabel feel, her responses in the two interview scenarios were similar. They included comments such as, "I would not mind." Mabel explained that she would give particular attention to the child and in the post-interview scenario, she said that she would get Sifiso's aunt or grandmother to explain why she had brought him to school and not the mother. This comment does not indicate that Mabel is aware of the impact of the child's emotions on her own. It does, however, draw on discussions held in the seminars in which it was explained that children need to know their parents' whereabouts, as well as to be familiar with a routine, in order to feel secure.

4.6.2 Participation In The Work Discussion Seminars

Mabel was an active, vocal participant. She regularly brought cases of difficult children for consideration in the group, acted on suggestions made and provided feedback to the group in subsequent sessions. She listened to the other participants and made helpful comments, where appropriate.

In the fifth session, two children were being discussed, one of whom was from Mabel's crèche. The idea that children often need explanations for certain decisions made by adults was being considered. Mabel responded in a manner which was a type of confession, "We do things without consulting our children. We just think that the child will be satisfied with that."

In the last session, in which the idea that eating, feeding and food might be symbolic of underlying emotional difficulties was discussed, Mabel indicated her understanding of a mother's need to feed her child after a long absence in the comment, "she closes the gap with food."

4.6.3 Evaluation

Mabel said that she found the activity of sharing very helpful because it helped her "to know more about children." She said that she felt more equipped to handle problems with children and to advise parents on difficulties they face with their children.

She said that the groups could have been more helpful "if everyone was talking", indicating that she thought that some participants might have been too reticent. In addition, she said it would have been helpful for the group to meet with the parents concerned. "We really need to educate our black brothers and sisters about bringing up their children, not disturbing their growth."

Mabel expressed a wish to be "taught more about problem children, so that we can be able to educate and help our communities."

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

5.1 Interpretation Of Findings

As was shown in the previous chapter, each participant appeared to progress during the series of Work Discussion Seminars. This 'progress' was, however, not uniform but unique to each participant, and was shown in a very small sample. Nevertheless, the outcome of the Work Discussion Seminars suggests that psychoanalytically-informed thinking can make a contribution to the training of Early Childhood Development practitioners in South Africa. In addition, the results suggest that Work Discussion Seminars are a useful training tool, and worthy of further consideration. Such consideration needs to focus on how to maximise their utility within a South African context.

Betty Joseph (1986), in an attempt to assess the 'progress' (or lack thereof) of her patients in psychoanalysis, makes use of the term 'psychic change'. She explains that it is the moment-to-moment shifts in the session that can become the foundation of the possibility of lasting processes of psychic change. She uses the term 'psychic change' to mean a long-term desirable kind of change, as well as to denote any kind of change in the functioning of patients.

This term may be adapted for use in understanding the kinds of shifts in thinking demonstrated by the participants in the series of Work Discussion Seminars conducted for the purposes of this study. As the descriptions in the previous chapter indicate, the moment-to-moment shifts in understanding were evident during the seminars and upon reflection of them. Many of these moment-to-moment shifts took place within the realm of the "unthought known". This term, coined by Christopher Bollas (1987), describes the unprocessed knowledge that we unconsciously possess but have never articulated into consciousness. Putting words to these unconsciously known but unthought-out thoughts, in the seminars, is a function of mental processing. The seminars acted as a forum in which the unprocessed, unthought-about thoughts could be examined and "metabolised" with the help of the more experienced seminar leader (Raphael-Leff, 1993).

The changes evidenced by the participants are largely of an individual nature. From their responses to the post-interviews, as compared with the pre-interviews, as well as from their participation in the Work Discussion Seminars themselves, it is evident that one participant might have progressed in an area where no progress is evidenced by another. However, in general, in the analysis of the progress of each participant, presented above, it is possible to see general development in the following areas:

- in the understanding of how a child's background history comes to impact upon his/her behaviour and emotions;
- in the idea that behaviour/play can be symbolic (five out of the six participants evidenced a shift in this area);
- in the acknowledgement that it is permissible to feel angry, upset, depressed, worn out, etc, as a response to working with children (five out of the six participants evidenced a shift in this area).

In addition to the above, development occurred in the participants' understanding that close observation of children and their behaviour is a useful entry point into starting to understand their difficulties. This idea is the bedrock upon which Work Discussion Seminars are founded.

A specific point, discussed in the seminars, seemed to have made an impact on all the participants: the need for routine in a child's life, one that is comprehensible to him/her. This point could be one of those which falls into the realm of the "unthought known" which was brought into consciousness by discussions in the seminars. Such a point might seem trivial and irrelevant, but is one which is often overlooked by parents and caregivers. Discussions of various children brought to light the way in which children are powerfully affected by the manner in which their caretakers manage their care, and the consequent effects of this care, which manifest themselves in their behaviour.

The informal evaluations given by the participants at the end of the series of Work Discussion Seminars emphasise a crucial aspect connected to the 'process' of Work Discussion Seminars. Each of the six participants mentioned how much she benefited from being able to share her concerns with the rest of the group. This 'sharing' seems to have been beneficial on at least three levels:

i) on the level of providing the participants with the opportunity to express feelings of inadequacy, uncertainty, to "let off some steam", and to have these feelings heard and acknowledged, i.e. to have felt contained;

ii) on the level of being able to share ideas about the origin and possible meanings of a child's distress or behaviour, i.e. to have a deepened understanding of children's development and emotional functioning;

iii) on the level of being able to take what was discussed in the seminars and share the ideas with assistants in the participants' own daycare centres, thereby creating environments in which they and their crèche assistants would be able to talk about their own feelings, as well

as those of the children in their care; i.e. a community emphasis extending beyond the confines of each seminar.

In addition, in the informal evaluations given during the running of the Work Discussion Seminars themselves, one participant noted that in talking about one child, she is "reminded" of a child with similar problems. This indicates that discussions relating to specific children are helpful in encouraging the participants to begin to consider other children with similar difficulties on a deeper level. (This is evident in Vignette 2, Chapter 3. It highlights how the discussion relating to one child's behaviour in response to his parents' fighting, caused another participant to think about the behaviour of a child in her care, with a similar family background.)

Each participant expressed a desire for the seminars to continue. In addition, they expressed a wish to remain in contact with one another. This seems to emphasise the point that they began to experience one another as a source of support.

5.2 Theoretical Implications

Psychoanalytic observation methods are closely related to, and have been developed from, the clinical method of psychoanalysis. Hence the central tool is an intimate, one-to-one personal contact where transactions are subjected to self-reflective thought of as meticulous a nature as possible. Psychoanalytical observation methods, like those of the field anthropologist or ethnographic sociologist, require observers both to have in mind a range of conceptions and latent expectations by which they can give coherence and shape to their experience, and to remain open-minded and receptive to the particular situations and events to which they are exposed. They cannot know in advance which of the conceptions of which they are already aware will turn out to have a useful application. Nor can they be sure that any of their preconceptions will fit. What this method requires of its practitioners is the ability to hold in mind a loose cluster of expectations and conceptions, while remaining open to the experiences of the observation as it develops. They also have to be prepared to respond to and think about new experiences which may not easily or immediately relate to their preconceptions at all (Rustin, 1989).

Trowell and Bower (1995) contend that in the social services (which would include the education services) there is not only a need for specialist services. "We need a framework for understanding extreme emotions – love, hate, jealousy, envy, destructiveness. This is something that psychoanalysis

can provide. It also helps us to understand how these emotions come to be violently evoked and enacted and how they can be moulded and chanelled more constructively ... Psychoanalysis can function as a shared framework of understanding between professionals from a variety of disciplines, even if they are not using it as a therapeutic tool. This type of shared understanding can facilitate effective professional collaboration" (p. 4).

In light of the above, the writer submits that psychoanalytically-informed thinking can be utilised in a theoretically applicable and valuable manner within a South African context. On the basis of the areas, mentioned above, in which there are signs of progress on the part of the participants, there is evidence to suggest that psychoanalytic thinking began to function as a "shared framework of understanding between professionals" (or in this case, colleagues).

Moreover, it is submitted that Work Discussion Seminars, the tool chosen for the purposes of this study, can make an important contribution to the training of ECD practitioners. Although Work Discussion Seminars are founded upon psychoanalytically-informed theories in general, and the tradition of infant observation in particular, nothing in this study indicates that the participants felt estranged from the way in which the seminars were run. In fact, as mentioned above, the participants welcomed the opportunity of discussing their work in a group situation with people "in the same shoes" as themselves. An additional reason for their not seeming to have been alienated by Work Discussion Seminars might be, as discussed in Chapter 2, that Work Discussion Seminars are characterised by their lack of a pre-determined fixed agenda. Instead, their broad aims include the sharpening of the participants' perceptions and the enlarging of their understanding of the emotional functioning of children. In this light, participants are encouraged to bring material to the seminars which is relevant to them, rather than material selected by the trainer. This type of learning is referred to by Bion (1962) as "learning from experience", as distinct from learning about a specific topic, in a more intellectualised, theoretical and less immediate fashion.

5.3 Limitations of Work Discussion Seminars In A South African Context

5.3.1 Theoretical Limitations

The most obvious criticism of psychoanalytic approaches used within a South African context, of which Work Discussion Seminars are a part, is the fact that they originate in the case histories of Freud, bound up in nineteenth century Europe (Miller, 1999). "Eurocentric theories of human behaviour can never be fully relevant to this society as human reality is not the same all over the world – and

particularly in South Africa where the majority is still concerned with bread and land issues. Clinical interpretations based on eurocentric theories are problematic ... Psychology must necessarily be enmeshed in the social reality and must take up issue with the South African reality ..." (Anonymous, 1986, p. 83).

Having said this, it is clear, however, that it would be futile to disregard a century of rigorous study, development and continuous evolution of understandings that have taken place within the world of psychoanalysis.

In attempting to address this potential impasse, theorists have proposed a variety of ways in which to carve out a relevant and meaningful place for psychoanalytic thinking within a South African context. Among these, Perkel (1988) argues that "It is not so much the clinical skill that needs redirection – it is rather the ideological foundation that instructs to whom, and how these skills are supplied that requires attention" (p. 58).

Dawes (1986) suggests that a change is needed from a view of the person's problem which emphasises the notion of the individual "locked into a psychic dilemma, to [a view of] a person whose dilemma is understood in the context in which it occurs" (p. 34).

Vogelman (1986), Dawes (1986), Hayes (1986), Radford and Rigby (1985) have argued that it is necessary for psychologists working in South Africa to have a political understanding and to apply their skill within a political framework.

The seminar leader and the writer, who carried out the Work Discussion Seminars for the purposes of this study, were ever mindful of these serious issues. They attempted at all times to frame their interactions with the participants of the study within an awareness of their socio-economic and cultural realities, as far as possible. (An example of how this issue came to life in a practical way in the seminars is provided in Vignette 1 of Chapter 3, above, where the seminar leader is careful to ensure that she takes heed of the African principle of Ubuntu.)

Discussions in Work Discussion Seminars, which are based on psychoanalytic principles, place more emphasis on the meaning underlying a certain behaviour than on the behaviour itself. Other schools of thought within psychology might tend to invest greater primary interest in ways to eliminate unwanted

or problematic behaviour. This is the focus of constant dialogue, if not tension, among the various approaches within the broad field of psychology. On a few occasions during the course of Work Discussion Seminars run for the purposes of this study, the seminar leader stressed the idea that often, when a child feels that the adults in his/her life are trying to understand his/her difficulties, this leads to a lessening of the symptom concerned. This explanation is one which might be used to begin to address the potential criticism, referred to above.

Related to the above-mentioned point is the fact that any possible 'intervention' that might be considered by the seminar participants is based upon the descriptions of a particular member's observations of a child's behaviour. The other seminar members do not come into direct contact with the child concerned and are therefore unable to contribute insights of their own, independent of their colleague's perceptions. It might be argued that this lack of direct contact with the child concerned hampers the ability of the seminar group to understand and address his/her difficulties sufficiently. In response to this potential criticism, it has been found (in accounts of the processes of other Work Discussion Seminars) that constant observation of the child, and evaluation of any suggestions made regarding intervention, both by the participant directly involved with the child and by the other seminar members, seem, frequently, to result in an improved understanding of the child and a consequent improvement in his/her behaviour (Harris, 1968; Caplan et al 1997; Miller, 1997).

Miller (1999), in her work as a Child and Adolescent Psychotherapist, consults to organisations including the Johannesburg Child Guidance Clinic, the Kathorus Parent and Child Counselling Centre, ASHA, and, through ASHA, to educare workers who are part of the Impilo Pilot Project, among others. She offers an impressionistic account of the consultation work she has undertaken and suggests that, in her experience, the idea of receptivity and the importance of history and feelings, emphasised in psychoanalytic thinking, are acceptable to most black professionals she has encountered. In an initial assessment of what professionals to whom she consults – both black and white – find valuable in her approach, the following were listed: containment of anxiety, help in tracking detailed material in sessions, flexibility in discussing long- and short-term models, an interest in how the psychoanalytic model fits with cultural beliefs and being open to the clients' 'inside thoughts' (Miller, 1999).

Work Discussion Seminars can be viewed as one particular 'method' within the overall psychoanalytic approach. In this light, the features of Miller's work regarded as helpful by the professionals to whom she consults could be regarded as features of Work Discussion Seminars which are helpful to

participants thereof. This suggestion is supported by the comments made in the informal evaluations given by the participants of the Work Discussion Seminars run for the purposes of this study (discussed in Chapter 4 above).

5.3.2 Practical Limitations Of Work Discussion Seminars

In addition to the above, it is important to acknowledge practical limitations associated with making use of Work Discussion Seminars as a training technique within a South African context. These include the following:

- The fact that a professional, familiar with psychoanalytic thinking, is required to run the seminars. In South Africa, there are very few professionals equipped with this knowledge, as opposed to a growing number of individuals and organisations in dire need of psychological services. A related, additional point for concern, would be the question of how to fund the running of Work Discussion Seminars, were they to be set up on a broad scale.
- The fact that the number of people able to participate in a series of Work Discussion Seminars at a given time is necessarily quite small, so as to promote the potential for the groups to be containing and supportive to their members. In a country such as South Africa, where thousands of educare workers are in urgent need of training, the view exists that approaches that are able to accommodate large numbers of trainees at any one time would be more cost-effective, less labour-intensive and, therefore, more justifiable.
- The fact that there is diversity of culture, languages and child-rearing practices, which means that many traditions of wisdom most useful for parents and professionals in bringing up a healthy new generation, need to be taken into account (Miller, 1997). The few professionals equipped to run Work Discussion Seminars are not necessarily familiar with non-Western cultures and child-rearing practices and very few of them are able to speak an African language.
- The fact that educare workers, like those within the Impilo Pilot Project and ASHA, for example, already have a very pressing schedule, and attendance at weekly seminars is difficult for them for a number of practical reasons, including transport and the cost thereof, time constraints, ensuring that there are other members of staff or assistants to manage the daycare centres in their absence. An additional practical consideration is finding a suitable venue that can serve as a containing, stable and consistent environment in which the seminars can take place, as well as being central and accessible to all participants.

5.4 Limitations Of This Study

This study aimed to investigate the applicability of psychoanalytically-informed thinking to the understanding of children's emotional development, within a South African context. The Work Discussion Seminar was chosen as the tool with which to foster an awareness, in educare workers, of the emotional and behavioural difficulties experienced by young children.

The introduction of Work Discussion Seminars into the training of educare workers is a very recent development in South Africa. Their use has, so far, remained on a small scale and as such, this study falls within the initial, exploratory work being done in this regard.

The above underpins the first limitation of this study: the fact that it is a preliminary study, based on qualitative research methods, and that there are no other empirical studies of this nature with which to compare results.

Additional limitations include:

- The small number of subjects who participated in this study.
- The very limited number of sessions (six) offered to the participants. At the Tavistock Clinic in London, students undertaking an infant observation course attend weekly Work Discussion Seminars for a period of at least one year. There is a need in South Africa to try to find a balance between a course of Work Discussion Seminars offered for a period of a year, for which there would be no funds in the first instance, and which would present a host of additional practical difficulties, as listed above, and a course of Work Discussion Seminars which includes only six sessions. One of the conclu ons reached in this study is that, although there is evidence to suggest that Work Discussion Seminars are a useful training tool, the short duration of the course of Work Discussion Seminars run for the purposes of this study made it difficult to expect that any major progress would be attained by the participants thereof. It is therefore difficult to assess, in any conclusive way, the exact nature of the contribution that Work Discussion Seminars are able to make within a South African context.
- It became evident that the pre- and post-interview scenario, as a technique for assessing the progress of each participant, was problematic. Evidence of this is illustrated by the post-interview performance of Mabel, v dered by the writer to be disappointing. (This is discussed in Chapter 4 above. abel demonstrated very little in the post-interview of the insight and understandi hared in the seminars themselves. Reasons for this might

include the possibility that she felt anxious about 'being tested', or the fact that she was tired and distracted after a long day at work. (Her post-interview was conducted at her daycare centre a short time after she had returned from a journey she had had to make to Pretoria.)

5.5 Implications For Practice And Further Research

This study suggests that educare workers benefit from working with one another in a group setting, in which they are able to pay attention to the emotional development of the children in their care, whilst at the same time focus on their own emotional responses to their, often difficult, work.

Therefore, this study maintains that Work Discussion Seminars, as a vehicle for training educare workers, should form part of the overall training that they receive in ECD. Although organisations such as ASHA and the Impilo Pilot Project provide good training opportunities for the many ECD practitioners within their fold, what is offered falls short of what is needed, especially as far as the emotional and psychosocial aspects of children's development are concerned.

One of the implications of this study is that initiatives such as the Good Start Programme, upon which this study is modelled, should be encouraged to continue their work with organisations such as ASHA and the Impilo Pilot Project. Through working with established organisations of this nature, the work of the Good Start Programme, which has run a number of series of Work Discussion Seminars in the past, such as the one described in this study, will be able to develop further.

Such development could take place along two parallel tracks, simultaneously. The 'first track' could consist of training qualified psychologists, psychology students and other professionals working with children under six years of age. This training would draw upon psychoanalytic teachings, in particular, infant and young child observation, and would place emphasis on the experience of taking part in a Work Discussion Seminar. The 'second track' would involve the setting up of Work Discussion Seminars with the ECD practitioners themselves, in communities such as the ones from which the participants in this study originate. Graduates of the 'first track' could be utilised in working with ECD practitioners, thereby enlarging both the number of 'qualified professionals' able to carry out this type of work, as well as the number of ECD practitioners able to benefit from the experience of taking part in Work Discussion Seminars. Working with organisations such as ASHA or the Impilo Pilot project would promote the efficiency of the Good Start Programme, since a large number of ECD practitioners are already involved in these organisations. The practical and logistical difficulties inevitably

associated with setting up Work Discussion Seminars in community-type settings could thereby be curtailed.

A vital spin-off of having large numbers of ECD practitioners taking part in Work Discussion Seminars is the fact that, through them, other caretakers of children are able to be reached, including crèche assistants and family members. This assertion is based upon evidence, arising out of this study, which revealed that the participants of this study shared with their assistants the contents of discussions held in the seminars. In addition, parents and other family members were often informed about various suggestions or understandings reached in the seminars with regard to particular children. This is illustrated in Vignette 3 of Chapter 3 above, as well as in the informal evaluations of the participants, presented in Chapter 4.

The above suggestion that work begun by initiatives such as the Good Start Programme should be encouraged to continue and develop, leads to the next logical suggestion, i.e. that this work be accompanied by rigorous research. Research could be founded upon both qualitative and quantitative research principles, including action research methods, which would develop alongside any practical work being done. Comparative studies could be developed in order to investigate the assertion that "learning from experience" (Bion, 1962) results in a deeper type of learning than learning about a topic in an abstracted, more theoretical manner. This is one of the writer's assertions arising from this study, but it is acknowledged that further investigation is required in order to augment its use as a justification for the inclusion of Work Discussion Seminars in the training of ECD practitioners within a South African context.

In addition, research needs to focus on the elements of psychoanalytic thinking which are applicable to educare workers in South Africa. Further, research needs to investigate ways of making such thinking more accessible so that a common framework of understanding – referred to above – can be developed. This is essential if professionals and colleagues from various disciplines are to work together meaningfully.

5.6 Summary And Conclusions

This study concludes that psychoanalytically-informed thinking is useful in the training of ECD practitioners in a South African context. This is based, among other arguments, upon the one provided by Trowell and Bower (1995), referred to above, which asserts that psychoanalysis provides a basis for

understanding extreme emotions, such as love, hate, jealousy and destructiveness. In addition, they argue that it provides an understanding of how these emotions come to be violently evoked and enacted and how they can be modified and chanelled more constructively. In this light, psychoanalytic thinking can function as a shared framework of understanding between professionals from a variety of disciplines, and can facilitate effective professional collaboration.

The participants in the Work Discussion Seminars run for the purposes of this study found working with a group of colleagues beneficial on four levels:

- it helped them to form a deeper understanding of children's emotional development and behaviour through the sharing of ideas;
- it gave them the opportunity to apply the new types of thinking encouraged in the seminars to other children, whose difficulties were not raised or dealt with in the seminars;
- it provided containment for their work-related anxieties and concerns, thereby lending support to the idea that caretakers of young children need nurture and support themselves, in order to cope with the demands that working with young children present;
- it served as a resource which could be shared with other members of the community including crèche assistants and family members.

This study falls within the preliminary work being done in South Africa at present, aimed at finding a relevant place for psychoanalytically-informed work (of which Work Discussion Seminars are a part), on the one hand, while attempting to address the needs of a large proportion of the population who are in desperate need of psychological services and relevant training, on the other.

Although there is still much work to be done in this regard, this study has made a contribution to advancing such work in that it has sought to increase awareness of the nature and role of Work Discussion Seminars, a relatively unfamiliar training tool in South Africa. In addition, this study has focused on the emotional development of young children, as well as acknowledged the emotional involvement and the demands made on the emotional resources of those responsible for the education, psychosocial development and care of young children.

It is submitted that this study can serve as the springboard for further ongoing research, which will ultimately lead to better-trained ECD practitioners, who are more self-aware and contained and who are therefore more able to foster and nurture the psychosocial development of the children in their care.

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APPENDIX 1: SUMMARISED ACCOUNT OF EACH OF THE SIX WORK DISCUSSION SEMINARS

Session 1

The participants are asked to get together in pairs and each participant introduces her partner to the rest of the group. (This introduction technique is chosen in order to alleviate some of the awkwardness that often accompanies having to introduce oneself to a group.) The introductions yield information about each participant on both a personal and professional level.

As part of the introductions, the seminar leader suggests that the participants share their hopes and aims for the six sessions, which are summarised as follows:

- Personal growth and learning
- An attempt to go deeper into the "being of a child"
- To share problems, discuss them and help one another
- To improve the participants' skills to work with disabled children and help them impart their knowledge to their communities
- To help the participants register their daycare facilities

The seminar leader adds that one of the 'aims' of the meetings is for the participants to bring descriptions of children with whom they are experiencing difficulties, that could be discussed and thought about in the group.

Flora informs the group that she lives near an informal settlement where she witnesses many children roaming in the streets, unsupervised, while their parents are at work. She says that she is willing to help these children but does not have the financial means to do so. The seminar leader reflects on how helpless Flora must feel because there are so many children who need help, yet she does not know how to find a way to help them. She refers to a point raised by Minnie who is concerned about the number of disabled children in Soweto who are also not receiving the care they need. The seminar leader reflects that there is a lot of work to be done, but not always the resources to do this work, which is very difficult to bear.

Nomvula informs the group that the children attending her crèche attend free of charge because their parents can not afford to pay. The other participants react with surprise and concern at this and the

atmosphere in the group is filled with a sense of the pain and suffering with which the participants come into contact on a daily basis. The seminar leader comments that the participants seem concerned about how Nomvula manages on a day-to-day basis. Sabrina informs the group that there are children in her crèche who also attend free of charge, but that the paying children compensate for this.

Flora tells the group about a woman in her neighbourhood, who is a nurse and is seemingly financially stable, but who neglects her four-year-old son, Nkululeko. Flora has offered Nkululeko a place in her centre. He often arrives unwashed, but has stopped coming of late. Flora has seen him roaming in the street. The writer comments on the difficult situations in which the participants find themselves. She acknowledges that looking after children in good circumstances is a difficult task, and that it is made all the more difficult when one has to contend with all the worries to which the participants are exposed on a daily basis.

Minnie tells the group that one of the problems she encounters is that of children who come to her house on weekends and ask to sleep over. The seminar leader talks about how difficult it is to set boundaries and to know how much one is able to give and yet still have a life of one's own. She acknowledges that it must be more difficult for people who run daycare centres in their home and who find it difficult to refuse a child as a result. The seminar leader is careful to inquire whether it is culturally acceptable for the participants to allow children to stay over in their homes, leaving room for participants who may not see this issue as problematic.

The participants then talk among themselves about children who arrive very early in the morning and leave late in the evening and about what a long day this is for them. The seminar leader asks the participants how they feel at the end of such a long day. Minnie responds that they do not have an alternative and do what they can "for the sake of the children". The seminar leader points out that even if they have no alternative, there must be a feeling about this situation.

The seminar leader acknowledges that it seems that the difficult situations in which the participants find themselves had to be spoken about before the group could move onto talking about individual children and the difficulties that they pose.

Session 2

At the beginning of Session 2, Minnie shares the case of Masibulele, a three-year-old boy in her crèche. She describes him as very active and inquisitive and says that he is always asking questions. He arrives at 5:40 in the morning and always asks Minnie for food before she puts him to sleep until crèche begins. He has a squint in his right eye, as does his father. For this reason, the parents have not perceived Masibulele's squint as a problem, but Minnie has advised the parents to seek medical advice in this regard. Minnie says that Masibulele is intelligent and advanced for his age. She describes him as very sensitive, particularly to his parents' fighting. Masibulele has asked Minnie why his father beats his mother and he is subdued at crèche on the days following a fight between his paren' Minnie says that she did not know how to answer Masibulele's question and told him that his parents were playing. Masibulele would not accept this answer and said that he knew his parents were not playing because his mother was crying. Minnie says that when Masibulele is brought to crèche by his father he usually arrives crying, but that this does not happen when he is brought by his mother. Minnie adds that Masibulele has a very big appetite and is always asking for more food.

The seminar leader asks Minnie about Masibulele's eating, in an effort to establish whether his excessive eating during crèche hours is a result of not getting enough food at home, but Minnie says that he eats sufficiently at home. The seminar leader reflects that Minnie seems worried about Masibulele's question-asking. Minnie says that she is able to answer many of the questions that Masibulele asks, but finds some of them inappropriate coming from a three-year-old. The seminar leader explains that one expects a child of Masibulele's age to start becoming interested in the world and that asking questions is a very good way of finding out about the world. She acknowledges, however, that Minnie finds his question-asking worrying. The seminar leader continues that Masibulele's parents seem to work long hours and to spend a fair amount of time fighting with each other so that they might not have time to provide Masibulele with the kind of information he wants to know. She says that older siblings often provide this function, but Masibulele is an only child. The seminar leader says that one would need to try and assess whether his question asking is a sign of anxiety or whether it is part of a normal process of learning about the world.

Flora shares the case of a child in her centre whose parents also fight with each other. She says that when the child comes to school on the day following the fighting, he spends the day boxing the other children - "to show that he is still angry inside". The seminar leader points out the differences between the way in which the two children deal with their parents' fighting. She points out that the child in

Flora's crèche seems to come to school "full of the fighting" and his boxing is a way for him to get rid of the feeling and to pass it on to somebody else. She says that perhaps Masibulele's question asking also has the function of passing on or getting rid of the bad feelings. She explains that it is important for these children to have a container to take in their feelings and help them make sense of them. Flora's child does not talk about his feelings, he "boxes them out". He is both imitating what he sees and trying to get rid of the feeling into someone else. Masibulele's question-asking might be an attempt to have Minnie make sense of the world for him.

The seminar leader asks Flora how she deals with the child. She says that she takes him inside and lets him sit quietly on his own and watch television. The seminar leader suggests that Flora might say something to the child to help him understand what he is doing when he fights, possibly something like, "Maybe thinking about fighting is making you fight as well." The seminar leader adds how important it is for Masibulele to feel that Minnie is listening and trying to understand. This will not stop the parents' fighting, but listening and talking to a child can help him to understand what the fighting does to his feelings and to his behaviour.

The writer reflects that it seems that adults are not sure what can be said to young children and what cannot be said to them. Lily adds that it is difficult to give a truthful answer to a young child. One of the difficulties associated with answering children's questions, Lily explains, is that parents might not approve of this. She gives the example of a child asking where he comes from. A short discussion ensues and the writer acknowledges that this is a complicated issue for teachers, who have to respect parents' beliefs on the one hand, and contend with children's questions and curiosity on the other.

Sabrina raises her concerns about Lincoln, a six-year-old boy in her crèche. His mother came to see Sabrina with a packet full of toys that Lincoln had taken from the crèche and told Sabrina to hit Lincoln. Sabrina says that she is worried about Lincoln because he is supposed to be starting Grade 1 in the coming year and he cannot write his name, identify colours or do any of the tasks on which the children have been working. She says that she feels very disappointed and does not know what to do about Lincoln. He fights with the other children, spits into their food during meal times and is generally very destructive. Sabrina repeats that she feels she has achieved nothing with Lincoln and says that she feels "defeated".

The seminar leader asks about Lincoln's background. His mother is a single mother and Sabrina has the impression that they are very poor, although Lincoln is always neatly dressed. She says that his mother seems very caring, although strict, and always attends activities at the crèche when parents are invited. Sabrina does not know anything about Lincoln's father. Lily asks if Lincoln mixes with older boys and it is confirmed that he does. The seminar leader points out that it is often tempting for boys whose fathers are not available to have older friends.

The seminar leader inquires about the participants' view on hitting a child and it is established that they are not allowed to hit the children by law, but that in addition to this, they feel it is counterproductive to do so.

The seminar leader asks Sabrina if she thinks that there is a problem with Lincoln's intelligence. The writer explains that it is important to try and establish whether Lincoln has some type of brain damage that is preventing him from learning, or whether he has learning difficulties. To illustrate how one might start to establish this the writer asks Sabrina whether Lincoln is coherent, whether he is able to follow conversation and instructions. She says that he is able but that he is always fighting. Sabrina admits that one day she became so angry with Lincoln that she sent him to the "baby class". The writer acknowledges how frustrating Lincoln's behaviour is for Sabrina. Sabrina describes a time when Lincoln and the rest of the children were sitting in a ring. Lincoln was called upon to stand up and tell a story, but did not seem to hear Sabrina until she shouted at him. The writer asks if he was being disobedient or if he seemed to be completely empty. Sabrina says the latter seemed to be the case. The seminar leader asks if Lincoln has a hearing difficulty but Sabrina says not. Sabrina continues that Lincoln seems to pick on a particular child whom he knows is intelligent, disturbing him and pulling his ears.

The seminar leader suggests that the empty look that Sabrina describes makes one wonder if Lincoln has some feeling of emptiness which might be connected with not being able to manage a task or not being able to learn. She wonders whether his taking things from the crèche is an attempt to fill up that emptiness in some way. She adds that it appears that Lincoln seems to know who is intelligent and seems to want to disturb him. She suggests that underneath being horrible to the intelligent child, this kind of behaviour might be due to his feeling inadequate. The seminar leader asks Sabrina to get Lincoln to sit down and draw something for her and to tell her about it. Sabrina could then bring the

drawings to the group so that the group could begin to get a sense of whether Lincoln's problems are emotional or intelligence-related.

The writer asks Sabrina if Lincoln has ever completed a task that he has seemed satisfied with or proud of. Sabrina describes a charcoal drawing that Lincoln did. He described the drawing to her and told her that he had drawn his house and his car. The seminar leader suggests that Lincoln might still be a little immature and asks how he reacted to being sent to the baby class. Sabrina says that Lincoln enjoyed being there and he played with the younger children. The seminar leader explains that perhaps Lincoln might feel out of his depth in his own class. The writer adds that the charcoal drawing task was relatively free of instructions and rules, which might have allowed Lincoln to relax and tackle it competently. More complicated activities could make him anxious and cause him to feel incompetent, which is when he might disturb the more intelligent children in the class, thinking on an unconscious level, "If I can't do it, I won't let him do it because then I will feel even more stupid."

The seminar leader inquires whether Lincoln has to go to Grade 1 in the coming year and says that this raises the question of school readiness. Sabrina informs the group that Lincoln was sent to Grade 1 the previous year, but that he did not remain there and was brought to her crèche, still wearing his school uniform. The seminar leader asks why this was the case, but Sabrina says that she is not sure of the circumstances surrounding this move. The seminar leader explains that one is not sure how Lincoln experienced this change. For instance he might have 'heard' that he was not old enough for school, or that he was not good enough for school. Perhaps the humiliation of arriving at the crèche in his school uniform started him off on a poor note and this could explain to an extent why he has not progressed through the year. The seminar leader suggests that Sabrina try to find out more about Lincoln's history. She continues that perhaps Lincoln was expecting to be with certain friends and was disappointed not to be with them, or felt inadequate. She says that if one feels that one is no good, one often cannot achieve. She says that although he does not seem to be ready to go to school, the experience of starting school and then being put back into pre-school makes one hesitant to keep him back another year. She suggests that Lincoln might benefit from an assessment.

Session 3

Lily introduces a three-year-old girl, Thando, to the group. Thando is in her second year at Lily's crèche. Lily describes her as clever, but says that she cries very frequently during the day. The writer asks if this behaviour is new and Lily replies that Thando did not behave like this in her first year at the

crèche but has been doing so in her second year. Lily says that she has spoken to Thando's mother who told her that Thando cries at home as well.

The seminar leader asks Lily to describe the most recent 'cause' of crying. Lily replies that many things make Thando cry. For example, if she is playing with a group of children, she often comes crying to the crèche staff that the children have harmed her in some way. When Thando wakes up from her afternoon nap, as she opens her eyes, she begins rubbing them and then starts crying.

Lily says that when there is an indication that Thando is about to start crying the other crèche staff try to avoid this by pacifying or distracting her. The seminar leader asks Lily to describe the sort of crying, whether it is proper crying with tears, angry crying with rage, or a sad cry. Lily says that she thinks it is a proper cry. The seminar leader asks if Thando can be comforted and it is confirmed that she can.

The seminar leader asks what Thando's home life is like and Lily replies that there do not seem to be any problems. Thando is an only child, but shares a bedroom with cousins of hers.

Mabel wonders whether Thando is crying for attention because she does not get enough attention and "loving care" at home. Lily says that Thando is an only child and must therefore receive sufficient attention but Mabel points out that if Thando's mother works and has to come home and do housework, she might not have enough time to give her sufficient attention. Lily adds that she has heard Thando's mother reprimanding Thando for crying, saying that she "makes her sick." Mabel responds, "That's the thing." The seminar leader agrees that there might be some kind of difficulty in the relationship between Thando and her mother. She wonders whether the mother has always been impatient or whether she has become impatient because she cannot manage the little girl.

The writer acknowledges that it is difficult to find a reason for Thando's crying. She suggests that perhaps Thando never gets a chance to cry properly because every time there is an indication that she might cry, everyone around her tries to placate her and distract her from doing so. As a result, it is possible that Thando and those around her do not get an opportunity to establish what might be causing her to cry.

The seminar leader acknowledges Lily's attempts in trying to understand what is bothering Thando and praises her efforts to comfort Thando rather than reprimand her. She adds that Thando probably does

not know herself the causes of her crying. The seminar leader suggests that it might be helpful to get Thando to draw something and explains that sometimes when one draws, one puts down things that one does not even know one knows. This might provide some clues into Thando's crying.

The seminar leader says that Thando's crying makes one wonder what she was like as a baby, whether she had difficult experiences when she was born, or whether there were difficulties in the family. She asks if Thando was breast-fed and Lily replies that Thando was bottle-fed. (This question is asked in order to begin to trace some kind of picture about the earliest relationship between Thando and her mother, but is not explored in any more depth.)

Nomvula shares something personal about herself as a child and informs the group that she, too, used to cry. She says that she was very shy and found it difficult to talk and that she was teased by her family for crying. Lily says that Thando is not shy. She adds that she is fastidious; when putting on her shoes she always asks first if she has put the right shoe on the right foot. She adds that Thando eats slowly. The seminar leader comments that Thando is still only three years old and might be experiencing difficulties in mastering these tasks. She adds that Thando's mother might be impatient and therefore dresses and feeds Thando rather than allowing her to do it on her own. The seminar leader inquires at what age the participants expect children to be feeding and dressing themselves. They explain that from three years onwards, children are expected to begin to do these things on their own. The seminar leader explains that although Thando might be clever, she might still be more like a baby in other ways and could be struggling with tasks like feeding herself and putting on her shoes. She suggests that Thando might need some help and reminds the group of Lincoln - spoken about in the previous session - who seems grown-up in some ways but who enjoyed being in the baby group.

The seminar leader suggests that instead of asking, "Why are you crying?" Lily could say something like, "Maybe you are crying because it is quite hard to wake up and you find it very hard when you can not find your shoes." This would make Thando feel that Lily understands or is trying to understand her. The writer adds that often when one says to a child, "Maybe you're crying because you can't find your shoes," he responds, "No, that is not why I am crying. I am crying because ..."

Mabel asks whether Thando's cousins have recently come to stay, suggesting that Thando, who has been used to being the only child, might feel as if attention has been taken away from her. Lily says that that might be the case, but that that would be a problem at home and not in the crèche. The seminar

leader responds that Thando could be crying for the same reasons at home and in crèche. She explains that at the crèche, Thando has to share the attention she receives with the other children and if that is the difficulty she is experiencing, the sort of thing that is happening to her at home is being repeated at school. She explains that the things that affect children at home are 'brought' with them to crèche - that a child does not distinguish between 'home problems' and 'school problems'.

Mabel introduces Anna, a four-year-old girl who is in her second year in her crèche. Anna lives with her paternal grandmother. Mabel describes Anna as "slow" and says that she behaves like a two-year-old rather than a four-year-old. She says that the two- and three-year-olds grasp things better than Anna does. She says that Anna has speech problems and motions with her tongue in an attempt to imitate how Anna speaks. She describes Anna as "selfish" and says that she does not like to share with the other children. For instance on Fridays when the children bring fruit to crèche so that Mabel can make a fruit salad, Anna is reluctant for hers to be mixed with the rest.

Mabel informs the group that Anna had asthma as a baby and that she received treatment for a problem with her leg. The writer asks if it seems like Anna is able to hear and Mabel confirms that she is. Mabel says that Anna has made progress since she started crèche, although her speech is still unclear. She adds that when Anna is taught something she seems to take time to understand.

The seminar leader says that it is difficult to know from the description what kind of difficulty Anna has. The writer asks if Anna understands when she is being spoken to and Mabel confirms that she does. The writer asks if Anna can be understood when she speaks. Mabel says that she can be understood, but that Anna's speech is unclear and it therefore takes time for others to understand what she means. The writer comments that this must be frustrating for Anna and Mabel agrees, especially because she is teased by the other children as a result of her speech difficulty. She says that Anna becomes "furious" when a two-year-old can say something that she cannot.

The seminar leader suggests that it would be helpful for Anna to have a speech and hearing assessment and asks if Mabel thinks that Anna's grandmother would manage to take her to be assessed. Mabel thinks that the grandmother would manage. The seminar leader makes sure that Mabel knows where to refer Anna's grandmother. The seminar leader acknowledges that although an assessment would be helpful, Mabel is wanting to talk about how she, too, might be able to help Anna. She reflects that Mabel seems very patient with Anna and emphasises how important this is. Mabel mentions that

Anna's grandmother has said that Anna is clever, and that she recites things that she has learned at school and counts for her at home.

The seminar leader suggests that Anna might get anxious when she is in a group situation and that this might affect her ability to talk clearly. This might account for her being able to recite what she has learned to her grandmother at home better than she is able to recite it at school. The seminar leader asks Mabel whether she would have a few minutes to devote to Anna on her own. She explains that it might help her to be separated from the other children during which time she could learn a new task or song in a more relaxed manner. Mabel says that she could spend this kind of time with Anna.

The seminar leader comments that when a child is slower than the rest, one wonders whether he has some type of handicap or retardation or whether he has developed a little slower than other children and will catch up in time. She explains that a child's functioning might be behind because of emotional difficulties or difficulties in the family that are holding him back.

The writer suggests that in her time alone with Anna, Mabel should try to see whether Anna understands and knows things, but finds it difficult to talk and express herself. If this is the case, she would seem to have expressive difficulties. However if Anna does not have the understanding and knowledge, she might have some kind of brain damage. The writer gives a practical example of how this can be done. For instance, if Mabel is interested in seeing whether Anna is able to identify colours, she might say to her, "Pick up the red blocks." If she is able to do this, one can assume that she knows the colour red, even if she has difficulty saying the word 'red'. The writer explains that language works on two levels – i) understanding and ii) talking. If Anna has a problem with her understanding as well as her talking, she is in more trouble than if she has a problem only with her talking. The writer adds that if Anna's understanding is in tact, it must be very frustrating for her not to be understood by her peers and her teachers.

Minnie says that speaking to the parents sometimes results in their taking their children out of the crèche. The seminar leader asks Mabel if she thinks that Anna's grandmother will respond in this way. Mabel says not because the grandmother seems relieved at and proud of the progress that Anna is making. The seminar leader acknowledges that it is difficult to talk to parents about their children's difficulties because it is very hard and painful for parents to admit that their child might have a problem.

The issue of school readiness is raised again and the group is reminded of Lincoln, the boy in Sabrina's crèche. Flora comments that parents often do not accept the suggestion that their child remain behind for a year and in many cases try to send their children to school when they are five years old. Minnie talks about parents who do not participate in their children's education and do not come to open days at the school to monitor their children's progress, or read their progress reports. The seminar leader acknowledges that it is difficult to know how to involve parents. The writer adds that if one is nervous about what parents might say it is difficult to act in the interests of the child.

At the end of the session, the seminar leader asks if any of the participants have feedback or comments that they would like to make. Flora says that it is helpful because in talking about a particular child, one is reminded of another child with a similar difficulty.

Session 4

Session 4 begins with some feedback. Lily says that the Work Discussion Seminars are helpful because they provide an opportunity for the participants to solve their problems together. With regard to the children already spoken about, the seminar leader points out that it is too soon to see very big changes and says that a child may do something one week and be very changeable the next. She says that sometimes a child changes naturally, but sometimes a change is due to how one understands the child.

Mabel begins with some feedback on Anna. She informs the group that she spoke to Anna's grandmother about her speech difficulties. Anna's grandmother agreed with the suggestion to have her assessed and said that she would take her at the beginning of the coming year. Mabel reports that she spent some individual time with Anna. Anna seems able to understand but experiences difficulties in speaking and pronouncing words.

The seminar leader asks Sabrina for some feedback about Lincoln, but she replies that Lincoln has been absent for two weeks because he broke his arm. She says that because of it she has not managed to try any of what was spoken about in the group with Lincoln.

Minnie comments that there seems to be an improvement with Masibulele in that he no longer cries when his father brings him to crèche. She says that she suggested to Masibulele's mother to stop bringing Masibulele to school for a while so that he and his father could address the difficulty that they were experiencing. Minnie says that she asked Masibulele's father why he cries in the mornings. The

father responded that Masibulele is demanding and for example, asks to open the fridge before they leave for crèche in the early morning, which the father does not allow. Minnie suggested to Masibulele's father that he allow him to take what he wants from the fridge, but the father did not seem prepared to allow this. Minnie says that she can see that Masibulele's father gets irritable at Masibulele's question asking.

The seminar leader acknowledges that there seems to be an improvement in the mornings when Masibulele is brought by his father. She asks about his behaviour during the day, specifically with regard to his question asking. Minnie replies that he still asks many questions and tells the group that one night when Masibulele's father fetched him, he asked his father why he was drunk. Minnie re-iterates her concern about a three-year-old child asking questions of this kind. She adds that some of the questions leave her "stunned" as to how to answer. The seminar leader comments that Masibulele is an observant little boy.

The writer asks whether Masibulele's father ignores him and suggests that his question-asking might be due to a fear of being ignored. Minnie says that Masibulele frequently points to a poster and asks, "What's this?" When she answers, he continues to point at all the pictures in the room, repeating the answers he is given to the rest of the children. He is able to say his full name and address, which, in her opinion, is advanced for his age. Minnie sighs to herself that Masibulele is "naughty" and adds that he is always climbing on things. The seminar leader responds that it is difficult to know whether Masibulele is overactive or whether he is a lively, intelligent boy who needs lots of opportunities. She says it sounds like the latter because Minnie has told the group how much Masibulele grasps and takes in.

Flora reports back on Nkululeko, who has been attending her crèche since she spoke to his mother about not letting him roam in the streets.

Sabrina informs the group that she would like to talk about her two-year-old nephew, Savio. He attends crèche at her centre. Whenever a stranger comes into the crèche, Savio turns his back. At first this behaviour was not taken too seriously, but it has begun to worry Sabrina. When the police were invited to her crèche to speak to the children, Savio hid under the table. One of Sabrina's assistants dragged him out from under the table, but he screamed and hid behind her dress. This kind of behaviour has

manifested itself at home, too. Whenever a particular friend of Sabrina's comes to visit, Savio shields his face from her.

The seminar leader remarks that Savio seems to have a powerful anxiety related to strangers. Sabrina says that she is worried about why such a young child should behave in this way. Minnie asks whether Sabrina has recently spoken to the children in her crèche about safety measures. The seminar leader extends this question by saying that this sometimes causes one or two of the children to feel anxious. Sabrina answers that she has not.

Sabrina informs the group that Savio was born with clubbed feet, but that he is walking normally now, having undergone an operation at nine months of age. The seminar leader says that this might have been a traumatic experience for him, having had a lot of strangers who came and hurt him. Sabrina wonders whether he could still remember all that.

The seminar leader reflects that Savio had a difficult beginning as a baby, having undergone an operation. She asks each of the participants what her earliest memory is and each participant shares an early memory with the rest of the group. The seminar leader explains that the reason she tried to elicit memories is because she is trying to think about Savio and whether having an operation at nine months and some memory of being afraid of strangers has stayed in his mind. She continues that he might not, even when he is older, be able to say, "I remember that happened," but explains that one has memories in feelings. She refers to th memories that the participants shared and points out how almost everybody remembered an incident that was unpleasant for her, indicating that difficult things often stay in one's mind. In this light, the seminar leader says that she is wondering whether Savio's operation might have had an effect on him. She adds that one is not overly concerned if a child of Savio's age is shy, but acknowledges that Sabrina, who knows him very well, thinks that his behaviour is worthy of concern.

Lily asks if the scars from Savio's operation are visible, and it is established that they are. Lily suggests that Savio might be self-conscious about his scars. Sabrina expresses her belief that Savio is too young to think in these terms. Lily says that it is possible that the other children have pointed out the scars to him and that this might have made him worried or shy. Mabel says that in her opinion, it would be strange if Savio had not noticed his scars. She bases this comment on her experience of children who seem to show their sores and scars to people and explain how they were hurt. She continues that

sometimes a child even talks about the sore and scar of his friend. Sabrina informs the group that Savio cannot see his scars because they are at the back of his feet.

The group continues to examine Savio's fear of strangers. The writer asks if he can be comforted when he is picked up and Sabrina replies that he clings on with both hands when he is feeling afraid. The writer asks if Savio relaxes once he is picked up and Sabrina responds that he relaxes only if he is taken away from the stranger. She adds that Savio is also afraid of the dark and that if he has done something wrong, he goes and stands in the corner, despite never having been told in the past to do so. The seminar leader asks if Savio's mother was able to stay with him in hospital at the time of his operation. She explains that she is trying to ascertain whether he has had an experience, in the past, of being alone in the dark. Sabrina confirms that Savio's mother stayed with him in the hospital.

The seminar leader continues and wonders aloud about whether Savio has experienced something frightening. She explains that it might not necessarily be anything that the adults in his life would perceive as frightening. She suggests that somebody talk to Savio at a time when he is not frightened and say something like, "I know you seemed to get a bit frightened" or "I noticed when X came you were so scared." This would serve the function of communicating to him that the adults are trying to understand why he is frightened, in addition to helping him to understand what frightens him, by putting his fears into words.

Mabel suggests that it might be better for Savio to be comforted in the presence of the stranger so that he becomes accustomed to meeting strangers. Sabrina replies that when the police visited her crèche, she thought it unnecessary to put Savio through so much discomfort by keeping him in the room. The seminar leader acknowledges Savio's intense fear of the police and suggests that Sabrina try the suggestion made with somebody less threatening than the police, for example, with the neighbour across the road. Sabrina repeats her confusion at why Savio is scared of the neighbour (Sophia), especially since she is not a stranger to him.

Flora asks whether Sophia has a gruff voice. Sabrina replies that Sophia has a loud voice and that Savio might be frightened of her voice. She says that she has never thought of this. The seminar leader comments that this is an interesting point and one of the benefits of talking in a group, because when people are accustomed to things, it is useful to have a different eye. Flora adds that some children are frightened by people's appearances. The seminar leader comments on how difficult it is to be in a

child's position and to know that what sounds like an ordinary voice to an adult might be frightening to a child. She says that often one does things suddenly and one does not understand why a child becomes upset.

The seminar leader suggests that Sabrina keep an eye on Savio and try and think about what might be frightening him. She suggests that it might be useful to say something like, "Even though Sophia's voice is a bit loud, she is a nice lady." The seminar leader acknowledges that it might not make much of a difference, but when a child knows that he is being thought about, that is already helpful to him.

The seminar leader begins to sum up the session by noting some points which she suggests are useful to think about. One is Lily's comment that colleagues can help one another. A second is how working in a group can provide the participants with a different eye, or an alternative way of looking at situations. A third point is how important it is to talk to and involve parents, although this is often a very difficult and sensitive matter. A fourth point is the importance of taking a closer look at something – like the group attempted to do with Masibulele's question asking. Finally, the seminar leader emphasises the importance of a child's early history; when Sabrina began talking about Savio, the group might have thought that he is just a shy boy. But when she revealed that he was born with clubbed feet, this allowed the group to consider a few other possibilities.

Just before the end of the session, Lily shows the group a picture that Thando has drawn and explains that it is "a house, green grass, a frog, a tree, a friend, my daddy, my mommy, my granny and me". The seminar leader comments that the way in which Thando draws people is very appropriate for her age and that there is a lot of detail in her drawing, which is quite advanced for her age.

The seminar leader says that from Thando's drawing one can see that she is a little girl with a lot of ideas in her head. The house that she has drawn is quite a secure house and she seems to have an idea of a family in her mind. However, the house is in mid-air and is empty, which might say something about the possibility that Thando feels unstable or that she suddenly gets scared. The seminar leader explains that sometimes when children draw houses that do not have floors or are not on the ground, this might indicate that they do not feel very secure inside. She comments that it is difficult to find clues in the drawing about Thando's crying, in fact, she is surprised to find a drawing like this from a child who cries a lot. She says that the drawing has some happy strengths and looks appropriate for a child of Thando's age, and explains that although each child draws in an individual style, there are

some general developmental guidelines about how children draw people. They start with a big head and some little arms and legs, just as Thando has done, and then gradually begin to put in more detail as they get older. She cautions that one has to be very careful about saying too much from a drawing, especially as Thando is so young.

As it is the end of the session, these ideas are not explored in any more depth. The seminar leader encourages Lily to bring another drawing, which might provide clues about Thando's crying, to the next session.

Session 5

Mabel begins the session with feedback. She says that she has been observing Anna and thinks that she is a "little spoilt". She tells the group that Anna arrived at crèche late one morning. Her aunt explained that Anna had woken up with a runny nose and they had decided to keep her at home. At 10:30 that morning, Anna announced that she was going to school. Mabel says that she commented to Anna's aunt that they should not allow Anna to decide when she does and does not want to come to school, and informed her that there are school regulations that need to be followed. Mabel adds that on another occasion, Anna came to crèche with an apple in her hand. Mabel asked Anna for the apple and said that she would put it away for her until the end of the day. Anna's aunt told Mabel not to take the apple away because Anna had been crying over bringing the apple with her to crèche. Mabel explained that she did not think it was appropriate for Anna to eat an apple in front of the other children. She spoke to Anna who agreed to put the apple away. Mabel says it seems like Anna gets whatever she wants and that she is not sure how to handle this.

Sabrina asks if Anna has always brought something with her to crèche. Mabel replies that she usually brings something. For example, she often brings crisps. The seminar leader asks what Anna is like in the crèche when she is asked to do things. After some discussion, it is established that Mabel gets a glimpse of Anna's stubborn side when she occasionally refuses to do what the other children are doing and sits down in 'protest'.

The writer comments that before today the group might have said that Anna's refusal to do things in the crèche was due to her learning difficulties and the possibility that she feels inadequate as a result. However, after hearing what Mabel has told the group about Anna, one might think that her refusal to do things could be due to something else. The seminar leader asks if Anna has had a difficult

background as far as her parents are concerned. Mabel explains that Anna's parents are divorced. Initially she stayed with her mother and maternal grandmother, but did not attend crèche. Anna's paternal grandmother offered Anna a place in her home, saying that she would send her to crèche so that she would be ready to start school.

Flora comments that perhaps Anna is angry inside as a result of not staying with her mother. The seminar leader suggests that Anna might feel as if she is missing something within, which makes her feel like she has to come to crèche with something in her hand to make up for the emptiness. This seems to make sense to Mabel. The seminar leader continues that Anna's bringing something with her might be a way of comforting herself as a result of feeling different from the other children.

Mabel says that Anna's aunt seemed offended when she suggested that Anna should not be spoilt. The seminar leader comments that Anna's family seem to be frightened of her, and find it hard to set limits. She continues that it is difficult to know whether 'spoiling' Anna is doing her harm or good. Mabel adds that perhaps Anna's family spoils her because she was a sickly baby. The seminar leader comments that it is natural for parents to want to 'make up to the child' for her problems. She suggests that the group think about a way for Mabel to talk to Anna's caregivers, because if one says, "You are spoiling the child," the immediate response is, "Do not tell us how to bring up our child."

Sabrina explains that in her centre, when a child brings something to school, it is put in the kitchen, in view of the child. He is allowed to check during the day that whatever he has brought is there, but is only given the object back at the end of the day. The seminar leader comments that both participants had the idea of putting the object away for safekeeping. However, she suggests that different children might have different reasons for bringing something with them to school, which need to be thought about and understood.

The seminar leader points out that the question that needs to be thought about is "Why is Anna, who is 4, behaving like a 2-year-old?" She re-iterates Flora's suggestion that Anna might have reasons for being more angry than other 4-year-old children and cites two reasons that she can think of: that Anna has speech and learning difficulties which cause her frustration and that she might be missing living with her mother. Mabel tells the group that Anna's mother wanted her to come back and live with her and Anna spent approximately two weeks with her mother in Pretoria, but returned to her paternal grandmother because she did not attend crèche while in her mother's care. Mabel explains that Anna

might still go back and live with her mother, who is pregnant and wants Anna to return to her care once the baby is born.

The seminar leader reflects on how Anna might feel that she is pulled in different directions. This may make her feel powerless with regard to where she wants to live. As a result, her stubborn behaviour could be understood as an attempt to control the few things that are actually at her disposal. The seminar leader comments on how in the previous session the group thought that Anna's problems might be due to her learning difficulties, but in this session, it is evident that there is also a very difficult family situation that is contributing to her difficulties. She emphasises how one has to look at the child, the school, the family and the community and explains how there are different layers that all play together to produce a difficulty.

Sabrina reports back on Savio. She informs the group that she spoke to Sophia (the neighbour) and said that perhaps Savio is frightened when they talk loudly. She also advised Sophia to fetch her child from crèche herself, rather than send one of her older children, so that they could begin to address Savio's apparent fear of her. Sabrina tells the group how on each day Savio seemed to be a little more at ease with Sophia. She initially spoke to him quietly from a distance and then proceeded to get nearer and nearer to him until, by the end of the week, he finally allowed her to pick him up.

Sabrina also spoke to her brother about Savio's fears. He informed her that the family uses an expression, "Oupa Doelie is going to eat you up." Oupa Doelie is a character similar to the Bogey Man and is used to deter Savio from doing certain things or to encourage him to do others. Mabel adds that when children are naughty, adults often say they are going to call the police. She suggests that this could explain Savio's fear of the police. The participants agree that Savio's family needs to stop using the Oupa Doelie tactic and Sabrina says that she said as much to her brother. The seminar leader comments that some children become frightened at things like Oupa Doelie or the Bogey Man and others do not. She says that when a child is particularly sensitive, one has to be careful, but adds that this type of 'warning' should not be used in any event.

Flora informs the group that Nkululeko, the son of the nurse, has once again stopped attending crèche. The writer asks if the situation has returned to what it was in the past and Flora says that it has. The writer comments that the mother seemed able to improve for a short period of time but could not sustain the effort.

Sabrina tells the group about Tarryn, a four-year-old child, who has been in her crèche since the age of 2. Tarryn was sexually abused by her brothers and this resulted in her being moved out of her mother's home into the care of her aunt. She stays with her mother on weekends. Tarryn's mother has five children from different fathers and Sabrina says that she has many boyfriends.

Sabrina says that she has noticed a change in Tarryn, who has become subdued. One afternoon, Sabrina went with the bus driver to drop the children at home and Tarryn was very reluctant to go home and clung to Sabrina. She spoke to Tarryn's aunt, who has also noticed a change in Tarryn's behaviour. Recently Tarryn asked her mother why she had given her away, saying that her aunt is not her mother and should not be looking after her as if she were.

The seminar leader asks if anyone has spoken to Tarryn about the abuse and has explained to her that she was moved so that she would be safe. She explains that even if Tarryn understands that she had to be moved so that she would be safe, she might still feel that her mother did not want her. She suggests that Sabrina try and find out what was said to Tarryn. She says that if Tarryn says something like, "You took me away from my mother," one could say something like, "I understand that it feels quite sad for you not to be with your mother but there are reasons for it". The seminar leader explains that it is important for the adults in Tarryn's life to show that they understand that she feels upset and that they should avoid communicating, in word or attitude, the idea that there is no reason for her to be upset. The writer suggests that Tarryn might be worried about the impending December holiday, about being at home and about who will be looking after her.

The writer reflects that one of the things on which the discussion has been focusing is on how to talk to children about their worries. She refers to Anna, whose worries would include not knowing where or with whom she is going to stay and whether or not she will attend crèche. Mabel adds, "We do things without consulting our children. We just think that the child will be satisfied with that." The writer continues that it is probably the right decision for Anna to stay with her grandmother and for Tarryn to stay with her aunt, but that for them it might feel like they have been taken away from their mothers. Mabel says that Anna has not been told why she was taken away from her mother. The writer adds that the adults know that Tarryn's abuse is the fault of her brothers, but that Tarryn might think that she has been a bad girl and has therefore been taken away from her mother.

Session 6

Nomvula talks raises the case of an aggressive child in her crèche and says in an embarrassed way that she thinks she has handled him incorrectly. After talking through the situation, one of the issues raised is the fact that the mother of this child volunteers in Nomvula's crèche. The participants all speak about how difficult it is to have a parent working in the crèche and add that they think that a child feels that he is able to behave as he likes because his mother is present. The seminar leader raises the idea that perhaps a child whose mother works in the crèche might find it difficult in that he has to share his mother with the other children. This might account for his difficult behaviour.

Lily talks about a mother who volunteers in her crèche. She informs the group that this mother constantly tries to feed her child. She secretly takes food and gives it to her child, she gives him extra food at meal times and often tries to take food from the crèche home with her.

Flora tells the group about the daughter of a cousin of hers, who has a child in her crèche. She feeds her child before she goes to work at 6 o'clock in the morning. When she comes to fetch her child after work in the afternoons, she brings half a loaf of bread and some crisps and gives it to him without inquiring whether he has eaten. She once gave him a whole bunch of bananas. Flora says that she is scared that the child will vomit.

Both Flora and Lily agree that most parents ask their children when they fetch them if they have eaten. Lily adds that if a child replies to his mother that he would like something to eat, she feels as though she hasn't fed him properly, although she knows that this is not true.

The writer comments that food seems to have another meaning – both for teachers and for parents, that it symbolises something. She suggests that the group think about why food is so important, that there is something deeper than merely considering whether a parent over-feeds or under-feeds a child, or whether a child over-eats or under-eats. The writer refers to the child in Flora's crèche and explains that she was thinking about why mothers come home from work and feel the need to give their children food. Lily says that perhaps mothers are afraid that their children are not being fed well enough at crèche. Mabel adds that when a child comes home, even though he may not be hungry, he enjoys eating something "from home". The seminar leader reflects that 'home food' seems to have a very special meaning attached to it. She proposes that it might have something to do with the child's mother and his mother making it. Minnie says that some children develop bad eating habits. The seminar leader replies

that some children have bad habits and others are really hungry. She reflects upon the idea that the group members seem to be agreeing that food is a very important issue for mothers and children.

Mabel adds that she does not think that when children eat they are always hungry. She provides the example of her granddaughter who attends crèche very close to home, but who always wants something to eat at home before she leaves for crèche in the mornings and when she arrives home in the afternoons. The writer reminds the group of Anna, who arrives at crèche in the mornings holding an apple or packet of crisps in her hand. She asks the group to think about why Flora's cousin gives her child a bunch of bananas when she knows he has eaten at 4 o'clock in the afternoon and they might cause him to vomit. What is the meaning that food holds for people?

The seminar leader asks the group members if they think it is possible that parents might think that because their children are not with them, they are missing something else; not just food for their stomachs, but 'food' for their 'hearts'. The writer adds that Flora's cousin, who goes to work early in the morning and comes back quite late in the evening, might feel that somebody else is looking after her baby. Somebody else is taking her to the toilet, playing with her, educating her, and she feels as though she has not been able to do that for her child during the day. This way of thinking seems like it is beginning to make sense to Mabel, who says in a laughing voice that the mother "closes the gap with food."

The seminar leader continues that from the moment babies are born, right from the beginning, food and love are intertwined. The participants nod in agreement. Mabel talks about her granddaughter. When she comes home in the afternoons, she plays outside until her mother comes home. As soon as her mother arrives, the little girl asks her for food. The seminar leader wonders aloud whether the child might be less hungry if her mother picked her up and spoke to her for a while, after a long day apart.

The writer reminds the group of Masibulele, the child in Minnie's crèche who eats a lot. She suggests that perhaps when he does not feel secure or comfortable inside, he gets those kinds of feelings from his food. Minnie is unfamiliar with this kind of thinking and seems to find it difficult to relate the discussion of what food may symbolise with Masibulele's overeating. The seminar leader comments that the writer seems to be wondering whether Masibulele is hungry for attention. Minnie says that she is not sure, but adds that if Masibulele is given food when he arrives in the morning, he goes to sleep, whereas he cries and fusses if he is not. The seminar leader suggests that Minnie try and sit with

Masibulele in the mornings, rather than feed him. Sitting with him once will not lead to an immediate change, but over time it might, especially if Masibulele is hungry for attention. She refers to the expression 'comfort eating' and points out that many people eat when they are miserable and find this comforting. She explains that often appetite is an indication of some feelings inside.

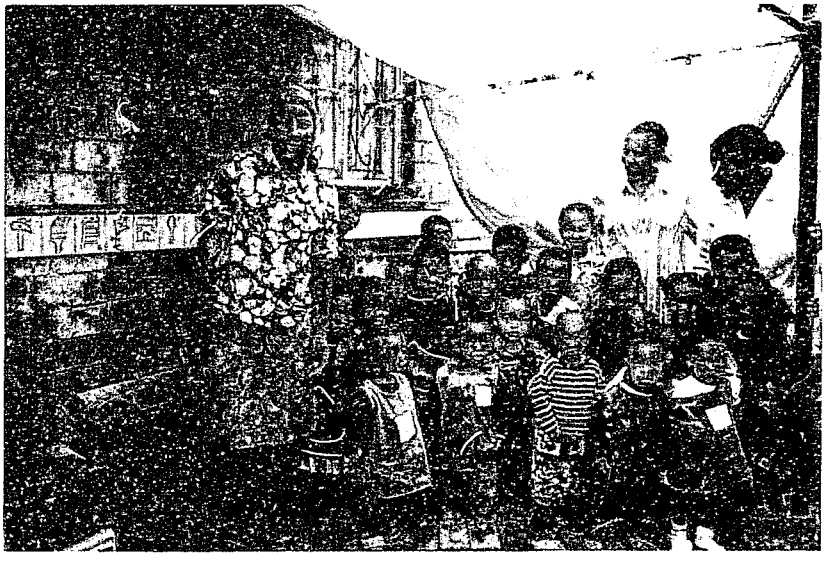
The group talks about eating in general and the seminar leader points out that one must, of course, check that the child is being fed properly at home before one tries to ascribe some underlying meaning to his eating. Flora talks about it being normal for growing boys to eat a lot and says that they outgrow it. Mabel refers to the possibility that a child who eats a lot might have worms, and the seminar leader stresses that all these things need to be ruled out before one tries to understand what kind of symbolic meaning food has for a particular child.

The writer says that if one is able to rule out physical hunger and worms, then one might think that Masibulele is hungry for attention. Perhaps if Minnie is able to spend 10 minutes alone with him from time to time, the attention he receives might fill up the hole inside him in the same way that a packet of crisps seems to do. The seminar leader suggests that Minnie sit with Masibulele and talk to him while he is eating so that he eats a little more slowly and so that the food seems to last a little longer for him.

The end of Session 6 signifies the end of the six-session series of Work Discussion Seminars. The seminar leader reflects how sad it feels to be ending.

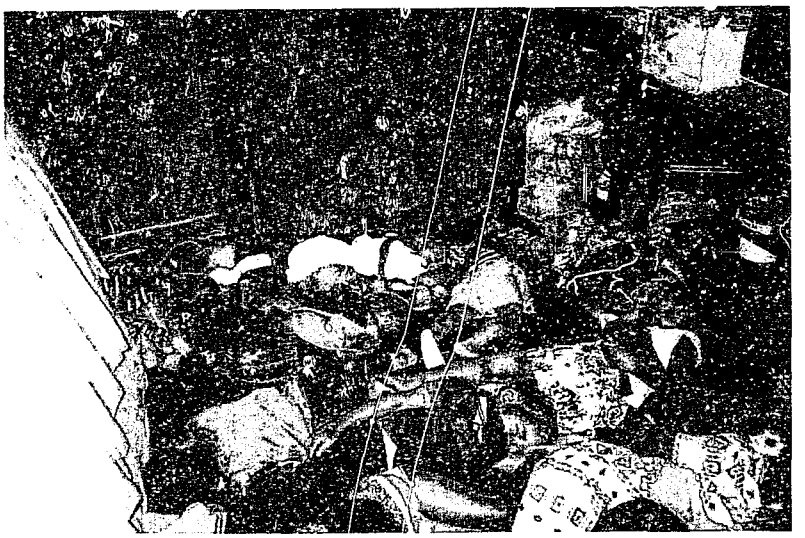
APPENDIX 2: Photographs Of Participants' Educare Centres In Soweto





These photographs illustrate the manner in which the educare workers have transformed the outbuildings and front/back yards of their homes in order to make them interesting and stimulating environments for the children. In addition, the photographs reveal the range of age groups of young children, who attend daycare in the same centre.





These photographs illustrate the crowded conditions in which many young children spend their days in educare centres. In addition, they reveal how educare workers are often required to re-arrange rooms in their homes in order to accommodate the children in their care. These are precisely the circumstances that the Impilo Pilot Project has been set up to tackle, through subsidies provided to educare centres for the purpose of upgrading their facilities.

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