


# Forgotten women in education: A narrative inquiry into the marginalisation of ECD practitioners

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**Background:** South African narratives of and by early childhood development (ECD) practitioners often focus on policies, practices and perspectives in research. While these are important for the development of the field, the voices of ECD practitioners, in this marginalised space, are silent.

**Aim:** This article aims to understand: Who are the ECD practitioners? What are the conditions of their lives and livelihoods? How do they negotiate opportunities for employment, socio-economic growth and further education and training?

**Setting:** The study describes the marginality of ECD practitioners by narrating the lived experience of work and post-school education and training of one mature woman in the Western Cape. By narrating a single story, the stories of others unfold; working in similar circumstances and negotiating the same opportunities in the harsh reality of poverty and oppression. Employing a narrative methodology is a commitment to decolonising the practice of research, where voices of the 'Other' are centralised and amplified.

**Methods:** An intersectional lens forms the theoretical grounding for this article with life history interviews as its primary form of data collection.

**Results:** Adult women ECD practitioners are mainly poor, black and female. They pursue access into higher education to improve their lives and livelihoods.

**Conclusion:** The intersections that shape their lives limit their opportunities for access and success.

**Contribution:** The power of narrative research, displayed in this article, ensures that voice is used to move the lived experiences of black women ECD practitioners from the margins to the centre.

**Keywords:** ECD practitioners; voice; marginalisation; narrative inquiry; lived experience; intersectionality.

## Introduction

To be successful in the different phases of schooling, young children need quality stimulation. Quality pre-schooling impacts adulthood to such an extent that it reduces dependency on grants and increases success in educational and career paths (Feza 2018). This kind of stimulation also leads to the essential skill of task completion (Ramani & Siegler 2011; Venkat & Spaul 2015), which further provides a strong foundation for success in the latter years of schooling and career development.

As the need for quality stimulation for learners in Early Childhood Development (ECD) centres cannot be understated (Department of Education 2001), particularly in the context of South Africa, where learners perform very poorly in both international and national tests (Feza 2012, 2018), the lack of focus on ECD practitioners is amiss. Given the fact that preschool learning 'establish[es] a critical foundation for children's academic success, health, and general well-being' (Anderson et al. 2003:32), it is evident that in order to fully sustain the academic development of learners during this period, our attention should also focus on teachers. Until recently, ECD was managed by the Department of Social Development (DSD).

It was reported to be in the process of moving to Basic Education, a process that commenced on 01 April 2022. However, no further information regarding the move has been provided and so the place of ECD within the broader spectrum of Basic Education remains in limbo. Thus, within this marginalised space, where the voices of practitioners have been silenced, this article aims to

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provide the context of ECD by narrating the lived experience of work and post-school education and training of one mature woman, named Elethu (pseudonym) in the Western Cape province. The stories of many unfold through the narration of one.

Narrative inquiry is used to provide understanding and knowledge regarding the social contexts of the lives and livelihoods of black adult women who are ECD practitioners in the Western Cape province. Research in early learning, especially in mathematics and language acquisition (Feza 2012), has primarily focussed on learners in ECD. As a result, we have limited research on the context of the practitioners at the forefront of teaching and learning in ECD centres.

## A narrative inquiry

Stories have the potential to 'endow experience with meaning' (Chetty 2017:80). Presenting data in narrative form also suggests 'knowing', hence epistemology is deeply situated within Elethu's account of her lived experience. The life history interview method is linked to the idea of narratives. As Goodley (1996) mentions:

... the life history approach taps into a huge source of available data - we are all tellers of stories, though we will vary in the way that we tell them. Stories appeal to our own positions in life in resonating as another's story collides with our own. (p. 336)

One of the criticisms of this approach to research is whether the data collected is fact or fiction. I argue that the focus of this method is the meanings that people attach to the stories they tell. Meaning can be found in the truths people tell and the fables they construct to tell others of their lives (Germeten 2013). Germeten (2013) questions whether a life can truly be understood or not and states that '[t]he social world will always be an interpreted world, from both the participant's and the researcher's view' (p. 623). Accumulating various layers of interpretation of data is key in the interpretivist approach in social science research. Thus, through narrative inquiry and the life history interview methodology of this study, I seek answers to the research question: Who are the ECD practitioners at the forefront of early learning in marginalised communities and what is the context of their lives and livelihoods?

According to Chetty (2017:83), the methodological framework of narrative research consists of two approaches that are different: (1) thinking *about* stories and (2) thinking *with* stories. Thinking about stories requires the researcher to adopt an analytical mindset and involves deriving categories inductively from the raw data. I leaned on the ideas of Bleakley (2005:535) in this article as she avers that a more holistic understanding of narratives is when the researcher thinks with stories by either empathetically 'entering' a given narrative or creating a story as research product as a way of capturing elements otherwise lost to a structural analysis. Within my commitment to the voice of women and the imperative to listen to subaltern voices, I aimed to capture the authentic voice of Elethu and did not edit her narrative for language. I did not change her

narrative to suit the structures and format of academic writing, indicated her narrative in italics, and considered it an integral part of the article.

## Access to adult learning

The factors that have motivated women students to participate in education and the challenges they face in its pursuit have remained similar over time. As early as in 1976, Astin reported that some women entered higher education for better work opportunities, and many 'left college to work or get married and only now find themselves in a position to complete the coursework toward the degrees they began working for previously' (p.51). Wright (2013), Reay (2003) and Kaldi and Griffiths (2013) have indicated similar trends more recently. Women students also constantly face institutional problems such as admission requirements, lack of credit transfers and limited student finance while braving the challenges of family relations and household roles (Ritt 2008). As will be seen, Elethu faced all of these challenges in her quest to access higher education.

Regardless of the specific reasons for women entering further and higher education, their reasons have been linked to ideas of empowerment and progress and better opportunities for work (Lee 2019). In terms of the South African context historically, the purpose of adult education for women was to challenge patriarchal ideology and practice. Walters (1996) notes eloquently the imperative for women to access further and higher education:

... must contribute to meaningful change in the condition and position of women ... It needs to be an integral part of the political processes in which women's political, economic and social demands are asserted at national, regional and local levels. Critical adult education work also needs to be addressed at the level of the family and the community. (p. 24)

Factors motivating adult women to enter into further and higher education have been linked to an ideology of progress and empowerment; it is the pursuit of women to gain 'voice' and occupy a more significant position in society (hooks 1982). Through research on training workshops for adult women students, stories of 'disempowerment' have been told. While participation in adult learning is crucial for the empowerment of women, even more crucial is the way in which curricula are designed and facilitation during workshops is managed. Walters and Manicom (1996) argue that the key purpose of adult learning for women is to enable them to act out empowered narratives in oppressive situations and relationships. Thus, for women like Elethu, adult learning is a crucial stepping stone to coming out of poverty and has the potential to provide them with opportunities to change the course of their lives. Access and participation in post-school education and training, particularly for women, is important.

## Context and methodology

The narrative foregrounded in this article was collected as part of a life history interview of ECD practitioners. Ethical

clearance was received to conduct the study in the Western Cape, and all participants provided written consent to participate. Elethu (pseudonym) was a 37-year-old single mother of two children at the time of the interview. After receiving her school leaving certificate through finishing school, Elethu completed a photography course. As part of her training, she joined an ECD centre to take pictures of the children at the centre on a voluntary basis.

After 3 months, the principal offered Elethu an administrative job at the ECD centre – she has worked in this sector ever since. Her roles shifted from volunteer to ECD practitioner, and after she acquired the necessary management competencies such as planning the day-to-day running of a centre and training teachers, her roles shifted to the principal as well. The centre is situated in an impoverished area in the Western Cape province, where the primary sources of income for most people derives from working in vineyards, in the manufacturing industry as unskilled labourers and in small, informal businesses. Early childhood development practitioners earn between R1000.00 and R2000.00 per month. With a deep desire to further her education and training, she had been persistently seeking access into higher education but was unsuccessful.

## Elethu's story

'I started working with the children, I was ... an all-rounder ..., I was working in all the classes as well. That's where I started to design their programmes, that's where I started to help them in their activities. Then while I was there, there was an internship at Town A, TVET College.

This institute is the learnership actually, it's only for ECD practitioners, because you know even in their background ECDs were mostly established by women who was just sitting at home. They were not educated, they were unemployed but they wanted to look after these children. So now this learnership is bringing in the education for these kind of practitioners. I applied, the principal said to me apply, and then I applied, I wrote the entry test and I got in. I did a Level 4 for 18 months, I did a Level 5 for another 18 months, and then I was chosen to do a Level 5 diploma. While I was at that ECD centre, I finished the level 4, while I was starting the level 5.

The principal shared an advertisement with me for the principal's post. I applied and was successful. So with my Level 5; I am now the principal of this Community Educare Centre. So now this is a journey that I never thought I would be in because if you hear my story I never planned to be in this journey, but now I'm here, and now that I'm here, I want to make a change because I never thought that the practitioners are going through so much struggle. So now that I'm working here, I'm like ... I have to do something, I must bring change. There's a lot that I can do, especially now that I'm given this opportunity to be a principal. The first time that I was at that crèche, it was like I felt that oh, these little children, they are robbed. The classes they are not child-friendly. These are just people just looking after children, but there's no stimulation, there is nothing that these children are getting that is under or is age-appropriate. Nothing like that. But I, and I've looked around and I saw that ECD practitioners they need help, there's so much help that they need, there is so

much that us people can do to uplift ECD because they are giving so much of their time, do you understand?

So that's where I started then now to talk about this, and you know what? At the TVET College, because us then in Town A, we are still under the Afrikaans system in some of the places, so Town A is also like that. I was not the only person that was there in my class, we are coming from Town A, some were coming from other towns as well, but the problem was still the language. The language was a barrier. Still, I am privileged because I'm coming from college. I am sitting in the desk with people that have Standard 8, with people that it's the first time even to enter the college. Everything is new to them and now it's not easy because they can't communicate because of the language. The Afrikaans became the block, and I have to step in now to be the translator in my class. I had to step in to help now these ladies to be able to do their activities in order for us to finish the modules. And I was like grouped, I grouped myself with the Afrikaans ladies because I wanted to be amongst them, I wanted to be able to work with them so that I can go back to the black ladies and translate for them and tell them what exactly is expected for us to do, so that journey has taught me ... and it was paying off because even the lecturers saw my effort, and that was when I was called in the following year to come and be the lecturer for IsiXhosa. This was like a highlight for everyone because I was actually the first black person to be on the lecturer's panel ... when I was doing the Level 4, I was taught IsiXhosa by a white lady. By a white lady who was coming from Free State, she did IsiXhosa in her university, she couldn't even speak a word of IsiXhosa, she was trying. But we as black students, we were taught by a white lady IsiXhosa, can you imagine. But then after I stepped in, it was easy, it was more easy now because we can communicate with our own language. Now they can share their stories with passion because they are free and they have freedom.

So it's not an easy thing, it's not easy I'm telling you, it's not easy. What's not easy about it, you go at TVET College for once a week, only once a week. And all the other days you are at the centre, so it's once a week and that once a week you get a work for the whole week, you have activities for the whole week. So next week when you are coming in you have to submit lots of activities, and know that this activities, yes it's an activity that are expected from the practitioner to be able to know them, but now these activities, you have to put them in English on paper while you are active in the centre, in IsiXhosa. Some practitioners they're not even fluent in that English, so now you know this, you know how you do it in class, but it's so difficult for you to put it in paper. So when someone is reading what you're saying and doing in your class, they don't understand how can you write something that is not making sense, having Xhosa in your class today. That kind of the struggle that we are still, even it's not cleared yet.

Because every year we recruit, every year we recruit but still English it's not difficult to do to be in a class of IsiXhosa but we have to do everything in English when you are in class and we have to express ourself in English while you maybe studied and then only until Std 6 or Std 7. [6th and 7th year of formal schooling].

While I was doing my Level 5 [ECD post schooling certificate] there, I saw that this is not me, this is not enough. This is not enough for me, because now it's been years and the government is not doing anything. There are no good salaries, we are not in a

good standard. But if I cannot change this, let me change then my life, let me then do something that can make me then to be a better person. That is when I pursued to apply at the universities, but no, I couldn't get in because my Maths, my points were very low. So I couldn't get in at University B. I couldn't get in at the University A. But there was no pressure because I'm working now. At least I've got something. But one day another friend, lady friend of mine, she is working at the Correctional Services, so we always have this girl talk that my friend, we are not yet there, because she is working at the Correctional Services but she loves teaching, she wants to go and study teaching but she cannot just quit work and go, she is saying to me she was at work and I was at- it was like January but we had not opened at the centre, she phoned me and said have you looked at your WhatsApp I sent you something. Please look at it and then try to follow the link, there is a link there. And then when I was looking at it, it was like the RPL programme, recognition for prior learning. I followed the link and it put me through, I saw the information and I phoned, I asked the lady, there was a nice lady, she said yes you can come in, we are open. That is when I went to the University A actually for the first time.

I was at the centre, I am the principal. The word principal, it's a big word, but I'm telling you for the ECD practitioners and the ECD field, the principal is just a word. There's no benefits. You are, the first time that I was there, the money, the subsidy that we got from there, the DSD, the Department of Social Development, For a month with 4 practitioners, one cook and one gardener with 60 children. And this R8000 [419.77 USD] has to feed these children every day. You have to pay the workers' salaries every month. I couldn't understand. I couldn't understand but I did it. God and the board was on my side. The parents, I had to step in to do fund-raising. It was actually the first time at that school to see a fund-raising, what is fund-raising. Parental involvement and then I had to go to get the- In Town A when you're going to Cape Town we're using a train. The same train that I was using even now at University A. Half past 4 train leaves Town A, actually 25 to five it leaves Town A and then it gets to Cape Town at 8 o'clock in the morning. Half past 7 at Town B. I move with that train to sort out the finances with the DSD, because I couldn't understand why are they paying so much money for so many children and so many practitioners, and then that's where I got to understand that through DSD they only fund the kids. They only fund the learners R15 per day. So with that money that we're getting every month, you as a school, you as the board, as the principal, you have to see that you have either income apart from this that will sustain you, otherwise if you're only depending on this money that you're getting from the Department then it means you will collapse, because it will never be enough. That's where I had to grow into so much that if there's nothing to eat at the centre, I have to go at home in my parent's cupboard to take food, because the little people that are there know nothing about money and the other stuff, but they're looking to get food. And my experience with the children, it got me to a point where I had to move, I had to shake Town A in town to get funders to fund us with toys, to fund us.

That's a lot. That's a lot because even now that I'm there, I can see okay, there some of the practitioners they love children, but some of them they know nothing about the programmes, because it's not just about to look after a child. This child is with you for like 8 hours a day, what are you doing with this child? What are you giving even this child so that this child can be school ready? So you have to even train them. Train even there the practitioners so they are able to have programmes in their

classes. You must know from 8 o'clock up until half past 4 what are you doing with the kids, you cannot just sit. Do you understand? So that was the kind of experience that I have to repeat myself on. And as a principal, I had to be a parent. I was the youngest at my centre as a principal and the youngest, but I was the one that was the parent, the big parent because I have to look after everything.

There is break-ins. Even you have no money, you have nothing, but there is break-ins, the community is still vandalising the same building that you are looking after, the same project that you are looking after, but the community is also coming to vandalise. But you still need to maintain, to contain yourselves to be always in a neutral position of ... It was a difficult position for me. While I'm the principal, and I know the ins and outs of the ECD, I saw that the ECD it's stuck. It's only limited. It has limited opportunities, because if you're finished with that Level 5 then you are done. You're going back to that centre and it depends on you to how you're going to your centre. There is nothing that the government is doing for ECDs. So I thought no, this is not me, I cannot stay in the mediocre. I need to be someone that is better and I didn't want to go out of the ECD. I wanted to go out to equip myself to come back and do better. Because I cannot sit here with Level 4 for the rest of my life and think that my ECD will be successful in the next years. No. I needed to empower myself first so that I can come back and do better. That's where I started to do the B Ed Foundation. I applied at University B and at University A. That time it was like the walk-ins, do you remember? It was not the online, the online start now, that time it was the walk-ins where you go in and you fill the form in once. So I never got in because my senior certificate was like poor. My points were not enough. Yes, they were told them that you don't meet the requirements because the form, because your points are not the specific ones or the required ones. Up until then I got the RPL opportunity through the interviews there. So that time I was only attending on Saturdays. Yoh, that was a very nice experience because it was actually the first time to sit in the university.

Only one Saturday, there is no other students it's only the RPL because Saturday, it's on weekends. So but those people helped us, they taught us how to write the essays and everything, preparing us for the first year. But they said, not all of you will be accepted at the university. You need to work on your portfolio of evidence, so that they can submit it to the faculty of Education. So we had to work hard. Very hard, and then in November then I got accepted at the education faculty. I was crying there on the spot. I was crying in my interview with the lecturers because I had to share my story. It was so emotional ... so many young ones here in Town A that are not privileged, they're coming in and out of my house to ask me how did you do it? How did you manage to get there? From the place where I'm staying, Town A and Cape Town it's totally different. So for me to step in at the university, it was like a dream come true. Just the word university, a dream come true.

... we want the government to recognise us. It's a step of recognition. They must come down, they must come and see the type of work that the ECDs do in order for these children to be ready. Those that don't understand why would they invest so much in education but not focusing on the foundation of their children. So my responsibility, even I was the one who was distributing the food parcel for those ECD centres they chose me, and because I have laptop, I'm the person who was liaising with the funders, with the lunchbox, the XW Foundation, they will come in town and load off the truck with food and I would



organise a transport from here and go and take the food and distribute the food to the parents because the ECDs were closed. So because of I wanted to see movement, avail myself and make sure that every school gets the necessary.

My focus is still in the ECD, my heart is still there. I never thought of it, I never thought I will work with kids, but kids love me. I love children, I have a passion for them, I want them to be respected, I want them their voice to be heard, I want them to feel free, you know? I want us, the South Africa to improve the ECD especially in the black community, where they lack resources, they lack resources. They lack information, so there's so much that needs still to be done, yes. I prayed to God, I thanked God, my prayer was only to thank Him, and after I thanked God, I said God, now my prayer that I had long time about ECD is being answered slowly by slowly, because now [*there is a study on ECD*] that means ECD is not dead.

So the ECDs must leave their work to go and study, they leave their homes, they leave their children behind, they leave their husbands, their family to Cape Town. When the Cape Town is a big city, they don't know anything about Cape Town, they don't have a place to stay and when they get there, maybe you are privileged enough to be accepted at the University A. Most of them they are sitting here in Town A, they cannot be accepted because of their education, they say it's poor. They are saying that we, our Level 4 and our Level 5 is only for ECD, there's nothing that can be done, they cannot recognise it, that's how they say it. But in your study you need to, they need to see the struggle of the ECD practitioner because now it's no longer the old women that are there. So even at the ECD centres there are people still waiting to go to the Boland, it's been years they are in the ECD centres but they have nothing to show.

They have no certificate, they only have, some they have Grade 12, some they don't, but they don't have Level 4 and Level 5 because of they can't all go to that class. It's one class per year. So that is a big challenge, we need, yes we need recognition, we need a platform, we need an entry that can say maybe this entry is only for ECD plus the RPL. You know I always say God made the way for me because after I was accepted ne for RPL and I went in and I go to study, I was recruited now, the Town A people but no one got in, it was only me from Town A. CAPS is telling you everything. It's telling you exactly what you must do with the children, it's giving you the exact time you must spend for each content area. That is not happening in the ECD. Those people don't know how much time you have to do a story, how much time to do what. What about the ECD centres? Nothing.' (Elethu, 37-year-old, single mother)

## Discussion

Elethu's narrative can be seen as a first-hand account of the marginalisation ECD practitioners experience as they travail through the uncertainties of life at the forefront of teaching and learning in this field. Marginalisation occurs through the experience of poverty as particularly black and coloured women residing in lower income areas creating and working in centres that have almost no resources and where they also have almost no training nor education in the discipline (Anderson 2001; Chetty 2017; Kehler 2001). This is accompanied by limited information and means to access and participate in socio-economic mobilisation. In addition, accessing and participating in Technical and Vocational Education and

Training (TVET) colleges also leads to marginalisation in terms of the language of teaching and learning of the ECD programmes, as well as how they are able to use the TVET certificate to articulate into higher education.

Elethu notes that women start ECD centres and women work in them. Aploon-Zokufa (2022) concurs that in the Western Cape, large numbers of ECD practitioners who aim to access higher education after participating in ECD programmes at TVET are women. The precarity of their labour as ECD practitioners, perceived as women's terrain, is a significant trope in the feminisation of labour (Khurana 2017; Kongolo 2009).

The interconnected reality of race, class and gender and the ways in which these three factors simultaneously structure and shape the lived experiences of black women have come to be known as intersectionality (Collins & Bilge 2016). Intersectionality provides an ideal lens to analyse the perpetuation of patriarchy from both a cultural and social perspective. People's lives and identities are generally shaped by many factors in diverse and mutually influencing ways. Furthermore, factors, such as class, gender, age, race, sexuality, religion, ethnicity, disability and nation, among others, constitute interlocking, mutual constructions or intersecting systems of power (Collins & Bilge 2016). Intersectionality offers tools to view how different factors cut across the lived experiences of black women who work as ECD practitioners in the Western Cape. It also shows clearly how these various intersections not only shape but push and pull these practitioners to, from and between access, non-access, resourceful and resource-less, mobility and stagnation, empowerment and participation in higher education.

Not only have feminist theorists (Kongolo 2009; Tao 2019) asserted that voicelessness, powerlessness and vulnerability are indicators that constitute the lived experience of poverty for women in Africa, but these indicators also put them on the margins of society (hooks 1989). For Elethu, and the practitioners she speaks of, this holds true as their social situations have impacted on whether they are heard and who listens. It is also indicative of what information they have access to. Elethu suggested that ECD practitioners have been calling on the government in vain for their ECD qualifications to be recognised, for adequate, sustainable employment and for being able to use their qualifications for further educational access.

In feminist thinking, the empowerment of women is central to development. It focusses on equality between women and men and on how to transform unequal relations into women's rights. Andrea Cornwall (2016) articulated strongly that women's empowerment is related to collective action and changes in both practice and consciousness. She noted that there was an insistence that empowerment was not something that could be bestowed by others, but about recognising inequalities in power, asserting the right to have rights and acting to press for and bring about structural change in favour of greater equality (Cornwall 2016).

'Power' can be defined as 'control over material assets, intellectual resources and ideology' and empowerment as 'the process of challenging existing power relations, and of gaining greater control over the sources of power' (Batliwala 1994:129). Empowerment can also be seen as the right to belong and to be included. It is the owning of space as active citizens and not necessarily as dependent subjects (Erickson & Faria 2011):

A key component of empowerment is for citizens to develop self-esteem so those in positions of formal power do not need to evaluate or act upon them: by developing self-esteem, citizens enact power themselves, and the state does not have to do so. (p. 639)

Research on domestic work has provided us with clear descriptions of the powerlessness and poverty of disadvantaged women in this space. Much like domestic workers, ECD practitioners are exploited economically too. Thus Turshen (2010) asserts:

Domestic [*and care*] work remains one of the most important occupations for millions of women around the world. Paid domestic work is virtually invisible: it is undervalued and poorly regulated, and many domestic workers remain overworked, underpaid, and unprotected. (p. 6)

Studies that focus specifically on domestic and care work show that women are 'increasingly pushed to low-wage, low productivity occupations, which involve greater pressure and drudgery', additionally '[w]omen, more than men, are increasingly concentrated in jobs that are casual, temporary and low paid' (Khurana 2017:922). Domestic and care work take place in the private spaces of the home. It is a form of labour that perpetuates the patriarchal stereotypes of women as embedded in culture and society. The attention that women domestic workers provide, specifically to children in the homes of their employers, cannot be overemphasised (Anderson 2001). The labour performed within their spaces of work is much more than just physical. It is personal and emotional, particularly if it happens over many years of the life span of a child (Anderson 2001). As Elethu's narrative aptly shows, the care work performed by poor, black women who are ECD practitioners leaves them 'overworked, underpaid and unprotected' too (Turshen 2010:6).

## Conclusion

The limited research on ECD practitioners' lived experience of work, access and participation in post-school education and training is just one form of the way in which these practitioners are marginalised. Elethu's narrative provides a clearer understanding of the particular ways in which ECD practitioners live through an interconnected reality of race, class and gender and the shape that this reality gives to the conditions of their lives and livelihoods. Early childhood development practitioners travail in silence at the forefront of teaching and learning in ECD centres every day, preparing young children for the different phases of schooling. Yet, they are forgotten in education! These women are located on

the margins of social and economic development and thus, they are abandoned on the margins of society.

Elethu's narrative is a single one, but it portrays the stories of many other: mature, black women and ECD practitioners in the Western Cape. Powerless, voiceless and forgotten! Stories that unfold through narrative inquiry speak for themselves. Thus, employing narrative inquiry in this study enables us to draw knowledge and meaning from the 'Other' in an effort to decolonise colonial research practices. Research that incorporates the voices of ECD practitioners is needed to further understand the deep-seated inequality that matures black women experience and the ways in which they navigate the harsh reality of their lives against the backdrop of teaching and learning in ECD centres.

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## Competing interests

The author declares that she has no financial or personal relationships that may have inappropriately influenced her in writing this article.

## Author's contributions

K.A.-Z. is the sole author of this research article.

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## Data availability

Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no new data were created or analysed in this study.

## Disclaimer

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