

Pedagogical Imaginaries for Eco-Pedagogical Life Skills: Humanising Foundation Phase Teacher Education Through Arts-Informed Research



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This article develops a practice-to-scholarship argument from a qualitative Master's study on eco-pedagogical literacy in Foundation Phase Life Skills in three Quintile 3 township schools in the Eastern Cape. Eco-pedagogical literacy is understood as the knowledge, values and pedagogical practices through which young children are supported to notice local living systems, participate in caring routines and develop age-appropriate understandings of human-environment interdependence. Located within CAPS Life Skills, the study foregrounds the subject as a significant curriculum space for ecological care, responsibility, observation, creative representation and place-based learning.

The study used an interpretivist, qualitative and arts-informed design with eight Grade 1 to Grade 3 teachers. Data were generated through semi-structured WhatsApp interviews, a crafting connections activity and speak-back reflections. Read through critical pedagogy, eco-pedagogy and values-beliefs-norms theory, the article centres teachers' eco-pedagogical imaginaries: gardens linked to feeding schemes and insect habitats, classroom plants with learner care roles, water tanks connected to scarcity and conservation, and schoolyards organised around modelling, integrity and responsibility. These artefacts are read as situated expressions of how teachers imagined eco-pedagogical Life Skills within the realities of Quintile 3 township schools.

The article argues that Life Skills can function as a lived, place-based and humanising curriculum space when teachers mediate environmental topics through dialogue, routine, care and local relevance. The study shows that CAPS provides openings for eco-pedagogical literacy through themes such as plants, animals, water, weather, soil and environmental responsibility, while teacher interpretation and school context shape how these openings are taken up. The contribution lies in showing how arts-informed postgraduate research can inform Foundation Phase teacher education by making visible teachers' values, ecological concerns and practical pedagogical possibilities for contextually responsive Life Skills teaching.

Keywords: eco-pedagogical literacy, Foundation Phase, Life Skills, pedagogical imaginaries, humanising pedagogy, arts-informed research, teacher education