



PROJECT FOR INCLUSIVE EARLY CHILDHOOD CARE & EDUCATION

A COLLABORATION PROCESS MODEL FOR PROGRAMME DEVELOPMENT

A PIECCE Knowledge Product
JANUARY 2020

The **Project for Inclusive Early Childhood Care & Education (PIECCE)** was a multi-stakeholder, collaborative project which took place from January 2017 to January 2020. The project aimed at supporting professionalisation of the sector by increasing access to qualifications for ECCE educators working with children from Birth to Four years old, standardising educator training, and helping to align occupational and professional qualification pathways. The main output was a standardised Programme Framework for the ECCE Diploma and Bachelor of Education at NQF Levels 6 and 7 (supported by exemplar materials). One of the other outputs of the project was a Collaboration Process Model as outlined in this Knowledge Product. Detailed information on the Programme Framework, the Illustrative Materials Packs and the full Collaboration Report can be found at www.piecce.co.za.

PIECCE was funded by the European Union (EU), the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF).
All consortium partners are listed at the back of this knowledge product.



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WHAT IS COLLABORATION IN PIECCE?

Collaboration and partnerships can drive, support and enhance desired features of successful education interventions, such as:

- Systems change
- Sustainable change
- Impact
- Scale and replication
- Spreading of practice
- Innovation
- Increased return on investment.

The key liberating innovation required for significant scale and positive impact within the scarred South African education landscape is without doubt "collaboration" - people working hard to create pockets of positive action and waves of real change ... Active and intentional collaboration is where the real action must focus.

John Gilmour, BRIDGE Chairman

Output 1

A Collaboration Process Model for Programme Development

A description of the project's multi-sectoral and collaborative partnerships, and the lessons learned about collaborative processes.

Output 1 AIM

To share the model with the sector so that lessons learned can be used in planning and implementing future collaborations for programme development.

Rationale for a collaborative approach: a fragmented teacher education system for Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE)

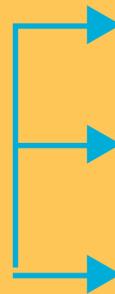
The landscape

Public Higher Education Institutions (HEIs): offer ECCE components in general teacher education programmes but are now beginning to offer ECCE-specific qualifications.

NGOs: offer ECCE training through unit standards-based qualifications at NQF Levels 1, 4 and 5; provider-based short course certificates; and occupational qualifications.

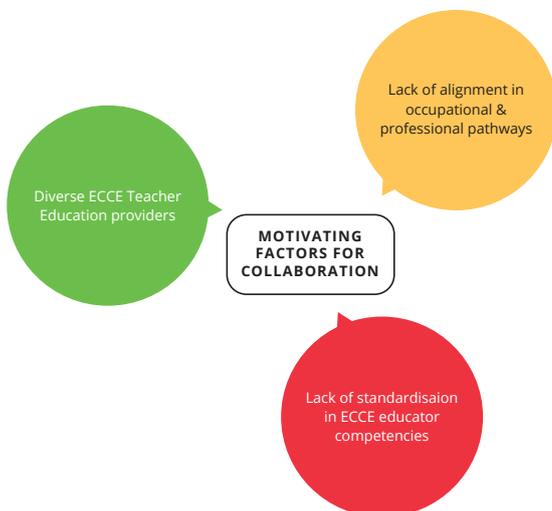
Technical & Vocational Education & Training (TVETs): offer Educare Higher Certificates and Diplomas (NATED Report 191); ECCE components in the National Certificate Vocational; occupational certificates (ETDP SETA).

NGOs: Saide, BRIDGE, Ntataise, TREE
 Universities: UNISA, Rhodes, UP, Wits, UFH, UOFS, UKZN, WSU, CPUT, NWU and UWC
 TVET: False Bay College

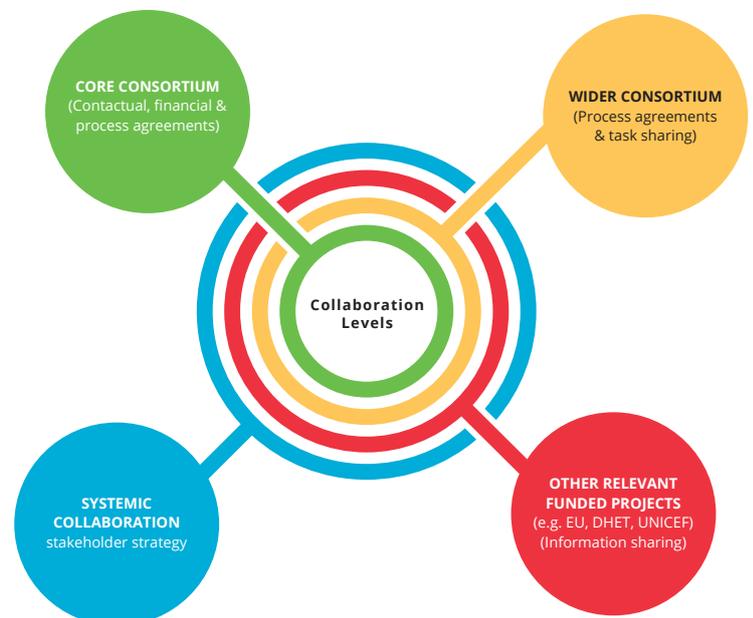


... leading to PIECCE as a collaborative consortium made up of eleven universities, four NGOs, one TVET college, and wider collaborative consultation with other players in the ECCE sector.

Motivating Factors



Collaboration Levels



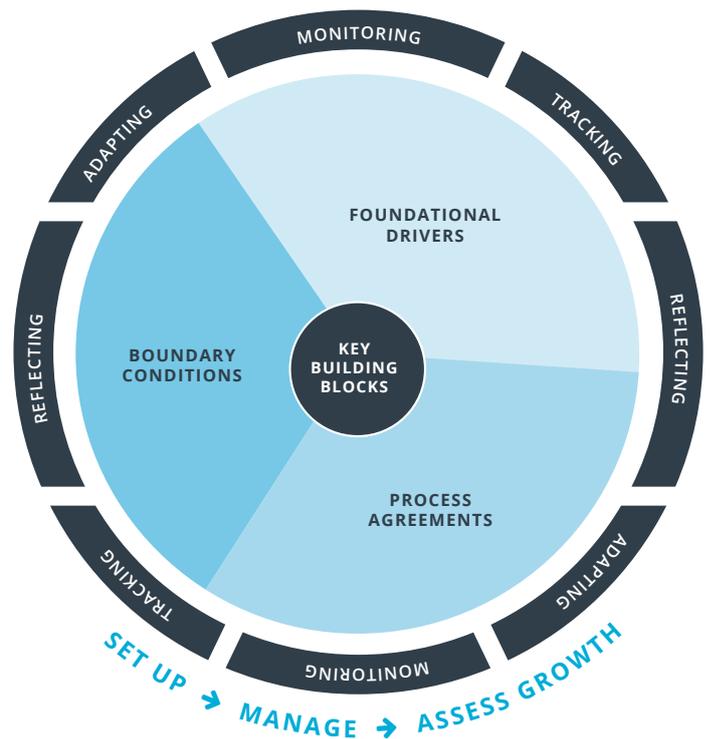
WHAT DOES THE PIECE COLLABORATION MODEL LOOK LIKE?

Key Actions

- Agree on a set of collaborative principles and values at the start of the project
- Use reflective practice to build collaboration throughout the project
- Value experiential and contextual evidence of collaboration
- Monitor and adapt collaborative practices as a result of reflections and feedback

Model building blocks

- **BOUNDARY CONDITIONS:** define understandings of sector and project context
- **FOUNDATIONAL DRIVERS:** define key drivers of Quality, Inclusivity and Collaboration to shape a shared project mission; develop common understanding of the principles, benefits and goals of collaboration for the project
- **PROCESS AGREEMENTS:** set out contractual agreements, and operational and relationship guidelines
- **STAGES:** set up the collaboration framework, manage and adapt processes, assess growth in collaborative commitment



Steps for effective collaborations

The value of building the Collaboration Model itself through an iterative reflection process was confirmed. At the same time, we learned a number of lessons along the way about the enablers and barriers to collaboration, and the key elements to consider

and build in to any collaborative project design. These elements or 'steps' are given below. While they are loosely sequential, each block can be revisited and elements adjusted throughout the life of the project.



Internal processes supporting the model

Using the collaboration principles

The principles were used to benchmark collaborative work on concrete outputs at different stages in the project. These outputs were developed through:

- Research Review Working Groups
- Programme Framework Working Groups
- Illustrative Materials Packs Working Groups
- Regular consortium workshops
- Site visits to ECCE centres in different provinces, including joint reflections and discussions with practitioners and trainers.

The principles were also incorporated into the Google Surveys used as collaboration monitoring tools, and often served as 'hooks' on which to base face-to-face Collaboration Reflection Sessions.



Online monitoring

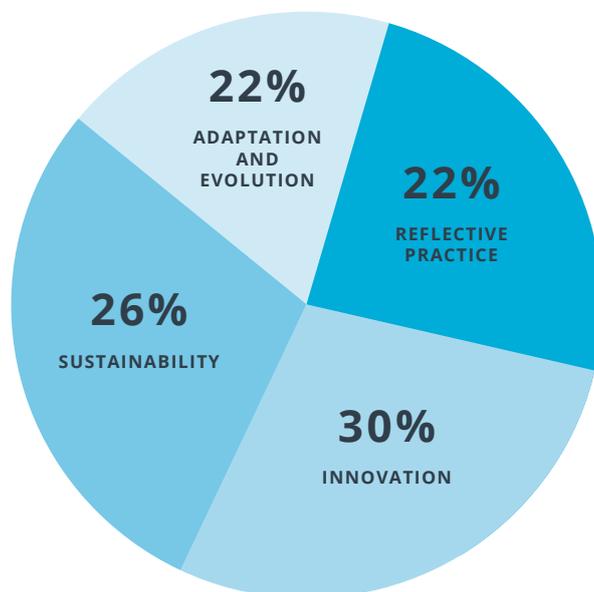
The monitoring tools mainly captured perspectives from consortium members. They related to the PIECCE drivers of Quality, Inclusivity and Collaboration, and to the 9 Principles. They gave space to express concerns and views on dynamics within the collaboration, and suggest improvements for subsequent working group processes. 6 tools were used over the three-year period. A finding from the core sample group who were in the consortium from the start through to the end of the project was that there was significant growth in positive attitudes towards collaboration, despite some initial resistance.

Here are two other examples of findings related to the collaboration principles, from tools completed towards the end of the project. (How the terms are understood, and possible reasons behind these findings, are explored in the full report.)

Question: Which three principles do you think are most important in order for collaborative work to be successful?



Question: Which three principles do you think have been the most difficult to implement effectively?



Collaboration Reflection Sessions

Four half-day events were held as structured 'Collaboration Reflection Sessions' over the three-year period. These sessions considered issues such as 'what worked and what didn't work' in the working groups, our own contextual assumptions and attitudes, and values and goals relating to our Theory of Change.

Here is an example of a group discussion brief for one of these sessions.



Discuss the benefits (or not) of collaboration for developing a standardised Programme Framework in the ECCE sector. What have the benefits of collaboration been:

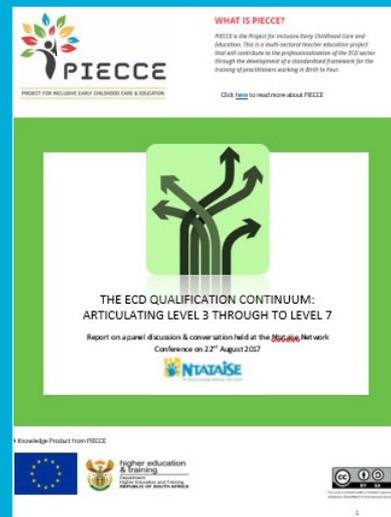
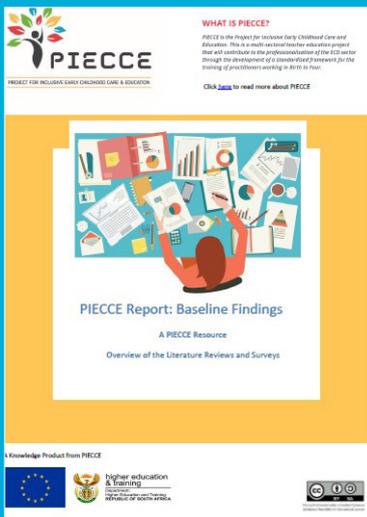
- for you as an individual?
- for your organisation/ institution?
- for the wider consortium as a multi-stakeholder group?
- for the sector? What three key lessons on collaboration in ECCE can we share with the sector?

The outcomes of these Reflection Sessions are detailed in the main report for Output 1, with some views highlighted at the end of this Knowledge Product.

External processes supporting the Model

The Stakeholder Strategy for external collaboration and communication included:

- Two PIECCCE Community of Practice events (September 2017 and July 2019)
- Report backs to the BRIDGE national and provincial ECD Communities of Practice
- Knowledge Seminar (July 2019)
- Collaboration with other forums on ECCE professionalisation and articulation of qualifications
- Interactions with other ECCE research teams and projects
- Development and dissemination of PIECCCE Knowledge Products to the sector
- PIECCCE website



WHAT HAVE WE LEARNED?

Collaboration doesn't happen by itself just because a number of organisations are in a joint project. Effective collaboration is an explicit, intentional, time-consuming and defined process based on a number of drivers.

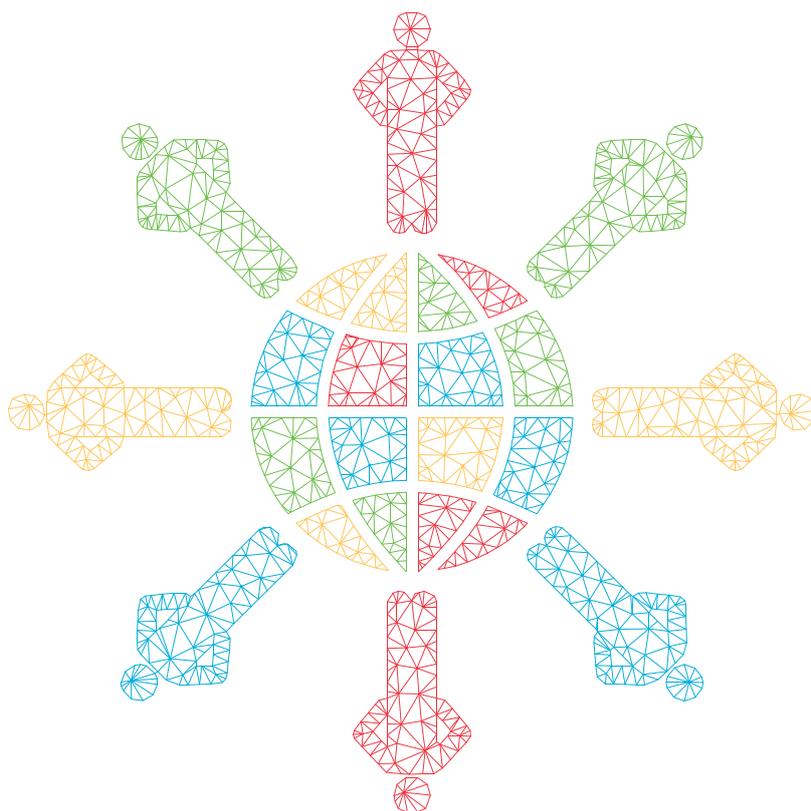
Collaboration enablers

- Find a champion to lead, structure and monitor collaboration
- Commit to shared principles and goals
- Allocate time for planning, implementing and reflecting on collaboration
- Allocate budget for collaborative interactions and collaborative platforms
- Talk about any issues or problems as they arise (e.g. expectations, assumptions about skills sets, roles and responsibilities, or about division of work)
- Develop trust between partners
- Nurture a collaborative mind-set in all consortium activities
- Get regular feedback on collaborative working processes from members
- Adapt processes that are not working
- Make sure that new entrants to the process are brought on board
- Track and report back on shifts in attitudes towards collaboration
- Set up and follow good communication protocols between partners
- Make sure that all financial and contractual agreements are well understood and well managed

All of these were experienced by the PIECCE consortium at different stages of the project, but were subject to reflection and resolution.

Collaboration barriers or disincentives

- Lack of shared understandings (e.g. purpose, scope and goals of the project or of the collaboration)
- Lack of trust and openness (e.g. fear of blame, feelings of inadequacy)
- Unequal power relations (e.g. different perceptions of 'status' of some collaboration partners)
- Lack of time and resources
- Poor communication
- Lack of buy-in and accountability (from individuals, or from management back at the parent organisation)
- Lack of fit between organisational cultures
- Imbalances between skills, or levels of effort put into the work
- Participant turnover (new entrants who were not part of the original agreements)
- Financial and contractual imbalances or blockages (e.g. scope creep, or delayed payments that have different impacts on different types of partners)
- External factors outside the control of a project (e.g. the need for programme expansion which may affect time frames and consortium dynamics; additional funder demands)



Apart from general lessons learned, here are some examples specific to the nature of the partners (HEIs and NGOs) and to the ECCE context.

- Consortium members were surprised at how little they knew about each other's respective sectors at the start of the project, and growth in understanding the nature of teacher education at different levels was huge.
- Project scope was extended by a request from DHET to involve additional universities working on the design and delivery of new qualifications for ECCE educators, as there were obvious synergies between the two projects. This placed time constraints on the work and had an impact on the dynamics in the consortium. At the same time, however, this increase in the number of collaborators added depth and richness to PIECCE.
- The hands-on involvement of the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET), in its capacity as both a funder and a state authority, was central to cementing the links between the Programme Framework and future delivery of the qualifications by HEIs; this will promote sustainability for the work of PIECCE.
- Collaboration led to capacity building in the project: e.g. some NGO partners increased their ECCE theoretical knowledge; some academics gained new insights into the realities of ECCE delivery and practice on the ground; novice academics acquired valuable experience through their participation.
- In terms of growth of knowledge, the two areas most often cited (by both novice and experienced consortium members) were curriculum development and collaborative processes.
- Concrete activities as well as workshop interactions support the development of mutual understanding and collaboration. The visits to ECCE sites were a prime example. As NGOs have vast experience in the Birth to Four space while HEIs do not, NGO partners organised these visits and activities around them. Interactions with the children, the practitioners and the trainers led to new shared insights taken into the conceptual work of the consortium.
- Personal relationships in the consortium were developed, such as mentoring relationships or mutual sharing of expertise and knowledge outside the project.
- Collaboration also opened up future partnership possibilities: for example, between different HEIs, and between HEIs and NGOs for implementation of Work Integrated Learning (WIL)/ teaching practice requirements.
- The concept of **'Think Collaboration'** will filter into student participation in initial teacher education for ECCE students.
- Contextual realities can undermine collaborative participation: e.g. the lack of consistent involvement from the Technical and Vocational Training (TVET) sector was a big gap; involvement of regulatory bodies for qualifications was also sketchy, and many issues around alignment of qualifications will continue to affect professionalisation of the sector.



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If we work together we bring in new perspectives beyond our own; we achieve more; we also achieve more quality.



PIECCE has improved my own ability and capacity to reflect, and I will take the practices of reflection and collaboration forward into the design and implementation of my own projects.



This process has given me different eyes through which to view projects. It has brought about a connection between minds, and a journey of discovery for me as an individual through the collaborative processes.



Collaboration, though complex and difficult at times, offers the opportunity for richness in learning from others, not only about the subject, but about oneself and other people. It invariably leads to one's own growth and growth in the sector.



It is great to know that principles can be linked to lived experiences in terms of the sector attempting to harmonise its efforts to create visibility for ECCE. The shared understanding of concepts, processes, products is a key take-away from this project that I think will provide a united voice going forward.

PIECCE was funded by the European Union (EU), the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). The collaboration was led by UNISA, Saide, BRIDGE and Rhodes CSD. Consulting partners were TREE, Ntataise and False Bay College. Other universities in the consortium were University of Pretoria, Witwatersrand University, University of Fort Hare, University of Free State, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Walter Sisulu University, Cape Peninsula University of Technology, North West University, and University of the Western Cape (joined in 2019).



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