



Dudu Dhludhlu from Bophelong Community Children's Home, Kelethabetse Maranela from Lethabo Educare and Alucia Ndhlovu from Kitso ya Bana Day Care exploring ideas around sensory gardens, and how to start similar ones at their own schools.

Teachers learn about sensory gardens

Reitumetse Mahope

Educators from early childhood development (ECD) centres in Mamelodi, Bronkhorstspuit, Eersterust and Eduplex preschool in Queenswood, were recently empowered to start small-scale sensory gardens at their crèches and preschools.

The idea to empower educators was as a result of a pilot project embarked on by the University of Pretoria's (UP) Mamelodi campus to bear a sensory garden on their site.

The sensory garden at Mamelodi campus was conceptualised and implemented in 2021 by community-based project of the UP Faculty of Engineering, Built Environment and IT (EBIT), Siyathemba Occupational Clinic at the Mamelodi Campus and Landscape Architecture students in the Department of Architecture.

The university also facilitated an online training session hosted by Dr Kate Kurkul of Merrimack College in the USA, where she educated the teachers on how they could use their gardens as outdoor classrooms.

Lessons to be learned include the importance of water, the development of seed and other science-based as well as nature-related concepts.

Project leader Dr Martina Jordaan said the idea was to assist the centres improve health and develop children through enhancing their skills.

"Such gardens help to improve the health, mood and cognition of those who visit them, and provide space for physical activity, whilst spending time outdoors, breathing fresh air and being exposed to sunlight are good for their overall physical health.

"Sensory gardens include features, surfaces, objects and plants that stimulate our senses through the senses."

