

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

My survey of the literature will focus on early childhood education (ECE) teachers' responses to curriculum change. I will examine the wider context in which ECE teachers find themselves, curriculum change itself, including departmental directives for lesson planning, an orientation to ECE teachers' classroom practices/curriculum delivery and more particularly, the factors (internal and external) that influence teachers' responses to curriculum change.

At a global level, ECE is a central focus of policymakers at all levels of government in many countries (Ryan 2004:661; Wallet 2006:17) and mandated or official ECE curricula are being widely introduced (Goldstein 2006:2). Policy statements recognise ECE as the foundation of lifelong learning (Development Bank of Southern Africa 2006:13; National Department of Education 2001a:1; The World Bank 2004:1; Yim-Mei 2004:79) and economists are linking ECE to investment in human capital and economic growth (Anderson & Hague 2007:3; Dodge 2003:2; Friendly & Lero 2002:3). Consequently, there is consensus that high quality ECE programmes are the basis for an individual to thrive throughout school and life (Chen & McNamee, 2006:202; National Department of Education 2001a:3; Qinghua, Yan, Yan & Qiong 2005:157). Woodhead (2006:16) argues that there are fundamental ethical objections to investment in human capital being a major rationale for developing ECE policy, specifically since it represents an instrumental view of the young child as a natural resource to be exploited. Kagan (2008:1) sums this up well:

ECE is currently regarded as a magical panacea that prepares young children for school and life, equalises opportunity, and prevents welfare dependence, incarceration, teenage pregnancy and school drop out.

I agree with Kagan that the debate is misplaced because it fails to recognise the importance of early childhood in its own right. Instead the focus should be on meeting the immediate needs of young children to promote their holistic development and learning and viewing ECE as a "public good" (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, OECD 2006:1).

Furthermore, ECE policies reflect the global increase in the provision of universal access to reception year (Grade R) programmes, to prepare children for Grade 1 (Basket, Bryant,

White & Rhoads 2005:420), to provide them with an advantage in primary school, and to ensure future success beyond school (O’Gorman 2008:55). The reception year, or Grade R, is the South African equivalent of kindergarten, that is, a year-long pre-school programme preceding Grade 1. Davin and Van Staden (2005:5) stress that the emphasis should be on children’s development and readiness to learn, rather than on readiness for school. However, many teachers have interpreted the introduction of mandated curricula as favouring academic knowledge and skills (Gordon & Browne 2008; Slanina 2003). This leads Goldstein (2008:253) to argue that ECE programmes are characterised by an “atmosphere of academic intensification” largely due to the lack of clarity on how official policy should be implemented.

The buzz about teaching [to] the standards [and] the ever-increasing emphasis on early development of literacy and mathematics skills ... and the pressures of “accountability shovedown” ... have sparked questions, concerns, disagreements, and confusion about the most suitable curriculum content and the most effective instructional strategies for teaching young children in preschool and kindergarten settings (Goldstein 2008:253).

A similar situation exists in South Africa, particularly since the introduction of the national curriculum in Grade R aimed at ensuring that learners are ready for primary school and formal learning. South African teachers may also be uncertain how to implement the assessment standards (Gauteng Department of Education 2009). Grade R programmes were previously informal, flexible and play-based and there was no official curriculum. In 2009, the Department of Education introduced the National Early Learning and Development Standards (NELDS) to guide curriculum development in pre-reception year programmes for children aged birth to four years (National Department of Education 2009). ECE teachers are therefore now required to have a critical understanding of the NELDS as well as the NCS (South African Institute for Distance Education, SAIDE 2010:32).

Grade R is the policy target of White Paper 5 on ECD (National Department of Education 2001a:10) and was initiated during the National Education Policy Investigation (NEPI 1992). However, the Grade R model of school-based programmes originates in industrialised countries, had been a privilege of white children under apartheid in South African, and people therefore continue to perceive it as being “superior” (Porteus 2004:363). In the post-apartheid ECE policy development process, policymakers have emphasised developing a cost-effective model for Grade R provisioning in order to meet

constitutional imperatives, specifically in terms of access (Porteus 2004:363). Biersteker (2008) in her critical response to the 2008 EFA Report of the National Department of Education at the EFA meeting held at the University of the Witwatersrand in 2008, warned that access without quality could result in inadequate Grade R programmes being added to an already struggling Foundation Phase.⁶ This risk was confirmed by a SAIDE (2010:5) report that notes that Grade R implementation has focused on numerical targets rather than quality. The National Treasury (2008:4) therefore recommended the extension of full-scale implementation until 2014.

2.2 Early Childhood Education in Context

Since early childhood is the period of life characterised by the most rapid growth and development (Walsh & Petty 2007:301), enhancing the quality of young children's lives through ECE has become an international priority (Woodhead 2006:4). The recent history of ECE can be traced from the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC 1989) and the rapid succession of initiatives from UNICEF, the World Bank and numerous international, regional and national ECE policy developments. The UNCRC is the most significant starting point for policy development on behalf of the world's children, its universal prescription for childhood has been contested, especially for endorsing western liberal and individualistic discourses of childhood (Woodhead 2006:25).

In 1990, participants at the World Conference on Education for All (EFA) in Jomtien, Thailand, pledged to make ECE a priority, to provide primary education for all children, and to massively reduce adult illiteracy by the end of the decade (National Department of Education 2005:20; UNESCO 2007:1). This commitment to ECE was extended in 2000 with the Dakar Framework for Action on Education for All. In particular, Goal 1: "Expanding and improving comprehensive early childhood care and education especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children" (UNESCO 2007:1) has accelerated ECE programmes. The Dakar Declaration reflects an increasing emphasis on educational quality and measurement of educational outcomes, in particular student achievement (Khaniya & Williams 2004:315). In addition, the effectiveness of educational activities, organisations and teachers are now judged according to the academic performance of learners.

⁶ For example, as reflected by PIRLS 2006 - see Mullis, Martin, Kennedy & Foy (2007).

Since these international conventions were established, ECE provisioning outside the home has increased rapidly and there is agreement that it plays a crucial role in complementing parental care (Fromberg 2006:76; Nupponen 2006:43). Signatories to the EFA declaration are required to submit annual progress reports, which are compiled into an Annual Global Monitoring Report. Although access is expanding, it still lags behind the set targets and quality continues to be unsatisfactory.⁷ According to the OECD (2006), a more unified approach to learning is required in early childhood and primary school systems. This should include a stronger focus on transitions, readiness for school and cognitive development during the early years. However, even in the twenty most highly developed countries, the early childhood sector is largely private and unregulated, with staff professional development and pedagogical programming being the most neglected areas (OECD 2006:8). This undermines the quality of ECE programmes and their potential benefits. Despite the lack of research in developing countries, it seems likely that the same challenges would be relevant.

Authors such as Ackerman (2006) contend that quality ECE requires much more than simply establishing facilities and hiring staff. Quality ECE is the result of specific, intentional practices that support the recruitment and retention of well-trained teachers. However, it appears that governments are more focused on meeting access targets than on improving programmes or building capacity among teachers (Myers 2006:7). As noted by Biersteker (2007), this challenge is pertinent to the South African context and may have implications for teachers' capacity to respond to curriculum change. In a 2000 presentation, Biersteker⁸ argued that inadequate early stimulation poses a serious threat to children's development and learning. Nearly one quarter of all South African children's development is stunted, two thirds live in poverty, and one third of women suffer from maternal depression. Such children therefore enter Grade R with significant challenges. Biersteker (2010) concluded that improving schooling depends on strengthening inputs much earlier on, with a focus on nutrition, maternal health and education.

⁷ Interview with the National Director for ECD, Mrs Marie-Louise Samuels. Mrs Samuels was a participant in a study on ECD programmes (DBSA study interview held on 21 May 2007).

⁸ Biersteker's presentation at the joint UMALUSI/CEPD/WITS seminar on Grade R: Readiness of children, 16 April 2010.

2.3 Curriculum Change in Early Childhood Education

Graham (1999:71) and Bottery (2006:103) are in accord that change in education reflects the values and technologies that are prevalent in business and commerce. Apple (2001:84) notes that managerialism has taken centre stage and that change in education reflects reduced professional power and status. Managerialism has shifted professional identities in order to make them more responsive to client demand and external judgement. Internationally, these factors have significantly shaped national standards, curricula and testing. Moreover, there are two dynamics operating in neo-liberal reforms, namely “free markets” and increased surveillance (Apple 2001:83; 2004:30). As a result, education policies have become strongly regulatory, linked to the neo-conservative sense of a need to return to a lost past of high standards, discipline and real knowledge. Similarly, Day (2008:243) contends that teachers’ work is occurring in the context of increasingly intensive and persistent results-driven policy interventions to ensure higher standards of teaching, learning and achievement, as well as increased efficiency and effectiveness. Within the context of “performativity agendas” and continuous monitoring, the locus of control has shifted from the individual to the system managers (Day 2008:243).

An international trend in ECE curriculum change identified by Smylie and Perry (2005:318) is the development of centralised systems of standards for learning outcomes and assessment. This is attributed to cross-national research findings that central curriculum control is positively related to consistency in subject matter coverage. The current focus of teacher development programmes in South Africa is on strengthening teachers’ subject matter / content knowledge, as reflected in the National Policy Framework for Teacher Education, 2007. Hirsh-Pasek, Golinkoff, Berk and Singer (2009:9) argue that good ECE pedagogy has been sacrificed for the sake of curriculum goals since:

Preschool classes have replaced playful learning with practice and drill. Blocks were replaced with worksheets. Both play and playful learning declined precipitously in US preschools, where they were sidelined as an expendable diversion in favour of early preparation for school test-taking... skills once deemed appropriate for first and second graders are being taught in kindergarten, while kindergarten skills have been bumped down to preschool.

Hirsh-Pasek *et al.* (2009:3) further note that:

Play has become a four-letter word. In an effort to give children a head start on academic skills such as reading and mathematics, play is discouraged and didactic learning is stressed.

These authors in their 2009 publication, “A mandate for playful learning” illustrate how standards have fundamentally altered early learning and teaching. In particular, they note how young learners are pressurised to know and do more at an increasingly younger age. This appears to be pertinent to South Africa where learners have consistently underperformed on the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMMS) and the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS).

2.4 Early Childhood Teachers

In the following sub-sections, I compare ECE teachers in general and Grade R teachers in particular, to primary school teachers because of the similarities of their contexts and job responsibilities. Such factors influence ECE teachers’ responses to curriculum change.

2.4.1 Profile of Early Childhood Teachers

Although the job responsibilities of ECE professionals are comparable to those of primary school teachers, their work is undervalued (NAEYC 1993:10). Wallet (2006:34) notes that the majority of ECE teachers in almost all regions and countries are female. Low salaries are attributed to the caring aspect of teaching young children, which is often viewed as requiring minimal skills because it is an extension of women’s familial role in rearing children (Ackerman 2006:99). Ackerman (2006:99) notes that the price of an activity (or the wages paid) determines its value. Therefore since caring work is perceived as a female activity and the skills required to perform women’s work tend to be undervalued (financially and in terms of status and power), a normative context is created by devaluing such work in comparison with traditional “men’s work”. Low wages tend to result in a high staff turnover, which is harmful to the development of children (OECD 2006; Torquati, Raikes & Huddleston-Casas 2007:262) in that it impacts negatively on their language and socio-emotional development, as well as the relationships they form with their caregivers (Ackerman 2006:87). In addition, low wages are attributed to the nature of the childcare market, in which the main mechanism employed to reduce costs is to reduce overall quality and pay ECE teachers less.

The need for competitive fees further limits teachers' remuneration since ECE programmes often operate as market-dependent, non-profit or for-profit businesses. Staying in business means remaining competitive and competing for the same customers within a small geographic region close to where families live and work. Inadequate state subsidies further exacerbate the effects of a competitive marketplace in terms of remuneration, and gender plays a subtle role in creating a marginalised status (Ackerman 2006:92). ECE teachers tend to be younger than primary school teachers are and although they constitute a youthful, mobile workforce, they have lower levels of overall experience ECE teachers often hold lower qualifications⁹ than their primary school counterparts and their initial teacher education is often shorter in duration¹⁰ (Wallet 2006:34).

Developing countries continue to recruit high proportions of untrained and poorly qualified teachers, for example in Sub-Saharan Africa, only 7% of ECE teachers have met minimum training requirements.¹¹ In Niger, Togo and Senegal, most new recruits to primary education receive 2 to 3 weeks of training before entering the classroom (Wallet 2006:19). Wallet (2006) cites evidence from Kenya to demonstrate how fees and private provision can ultimately affect ECE teachers' salaries. Since the introduction of free primary education, most Kenyan parents are no longer willing to pay for ECE. Decreased enrolments have led to reduced salaries for ECE teachers as the income from parental fees has dropped. Primary school teachers are paid according to legal statutes and salary scales, which do not apply to ECE teachers. As a result of free primary education, it has become even more difficult to mobilise resources from parents for ECE. Decreased job security and ECE centre closures are on the rise, especially in poorer communities (UNESCO 2006 cited in Wallet 2006:33). Ackerman (2006) offers the following analysis of the low professional status of ECD teachers:

ECE teachers' abilities to increase their policy capital and address these issues are constrained by the very problem that needs to be addressed. Because of low wages teachers cannot afford the kinds of post secondary education that

⁹ In South Africa, the minimum qualification for ECE teachers is NQF Level 4 or a FETC in ECD, which is equivalent to Grade 12 of schooling. However, the minimum qualification for Grade R teachers will become a Higher Certificate in Grade R which is equivalent to Grade 12 plus two years of teacher training.

¹⁰ Refer also to the section on professional development below.

¹¹ The minimum qualification is matric / Grade 12 plus four years of teacher training or the Bachelor's degree in Early Childhood Education.

could give them both higher status and the knowledge base to articulate why the field needs a skilled, well-paid workforce. The regulatory and economic systems that bring about low wages will not change unless they are addressed through policymakers' agendas, but teachers' pay—and the fact that the work itself is considered to be part of the women's work sphere—hinders access to the very mechanism and dialogue that could potentially rectify the situation (Ackerman 2006:101).

In South Africa, anecdotal evidence suggests that the relocation of Grade R to primary schools is having a similar impact.¹² Larger numbers of children were previously accommodated in community-based Grade R classes, and higher teacher-child ratios for older children meant that ECE centres were able to cross-subsidise their pre-reception year classes.¹³ Although stakeholders raised objections to the relocation of Grade R classes to state primary schools, it did not affect the implementation of government policy. Porteus (2004:363) attributes this to the fact that the ECE sector is highly feminised and less organised than other sectors of education. As with ECE teachers in Kenya, the status of ECE teachers in South Africa is significantly lower than that of primary school teachers who earn salaries and work standard hours based on government statutes and regulations (Clasquin-Johnson 2007:80).¹⁴

2.4.2 Pre-requisite Knowledge and Skills of ECE Teachers

The literature on pre-requisite knowledge and skills of ECE teachers reveals that their roles and responsibilities have changed since the introduction of official curricula. Teachers are continually charged with the responsibility of economic regeneration and are expected to develop the capacity for innovation, flexibility and commitment to change (Fullan 1993:18; Hargreaves 1994:5). Moreover, the ability to deal with change is considered vital to living in a post-modern society (Fullan 1993:3). However, ECE teachers' work has intensified because standards-based, official curricula present complex professional challenges (Goldstein 2008:254). In particular, teacher training and academic standards intended to professionalise the ECE field conflict with the persistent image of preschool

¹² Informal discussion with Ms Lucy Thornton, Director of Woz'obona, an ECE NGO based in the South African provinces of Gauteng and Limpopo.

¹³ Pre-reception year classes cater for children from birth to four years of age.

¹⁴ In South Africa, the Education Labour Relations Council determines teachers' conditions of service. See www.elrc.co.za.

teaching as the domain of untrained women who love and care for children (Lobman & Ryan 2007:377).

The changing early childhood landscape reveals that ECE teachers need to possess a dynamic range of skills, including specialised professional knowledge and the ability to effectively engage with young children and promote their learning (Chen & Chang 2006:1; Goodfellow 2008:17). In addition, teachers have to demonstrate an understanding of the early childhood profession and make a commitment to professionalism (NAEYC 1993:5). The increasingly diverse classroom contexts demand that ECE teachers create a caring community of learners, enhance children's development and learning, construct appropriate curricula, assess children's learning and development, and establish reciprocal relationships with parents and families (Jambunathan & Caulfield 2008:251; Laverick 2007:248). Through observing and assessing children's behaviour, teachers should plan and individualise teaching practices and curricula, as well as establish supportive relationships with children in a safe and healthy environment. Furthermore, ECE teachers are required to implement developmentally appropriate curricula that advance all areas of children's learning and development including social, emotional, intellectual and physical competence. The recognition that children are best understood in the context of family, culture, and society, requires ECE teachers to establish and maintain positive and productive relationships with families to enable them to better support the development and learning of individual children (Bredenkamp 1997:43; NAEYC 1993:6).

Ryan and Ackerman (2005:2) note that the successful implementation of educational change depends on ECE teachers' capacity and will. Teachers therefore require adequate levels of information, skills and resources to successfully implement curriculum change. According to Fullan (1993:5), teachers require inbuilt capacity that consists of the habits and skills required to engage in continuous corrective analysis and action. For example, reflection on practice should become a habit. Meeting the diverse needs of learners is a skill that all teachers should develop. Productive educational change depends on teachers' ability to survive the vicissitudes of planned and unplanned change while growing and developing, rather than simply their capacity to implement the latest policy.

The focus on preschool has changed, the role of the teacher has shifted from being primarily a facilitator to someone who is expected to plan and implement an academic curriculum for an increasingly diverse group of children ... teachers must have both

breadth and depth of knowledge about teaching young children (Lobman & Ryan 2007:371).

The above discussion illustrates that curriculum change in ECE requires teachers to change their pedagogy, to learn something new and to understand the principles framing the curriculum. Lobman and Ryan (2007) examined the knowledge and skills required by ECE teachers in the USA in relation to both initial teacher education programmes and continuous professional development. They found that in that context, ECE teachers need foundational knowledge in child development and pedagogy, including an understanding of curriculum content and ECE methods, which they have to be able to articulate, to justify, and to explain, especially to parents. These authors contend that teachers need to apply the knowledge of developmental theory as a tool to convince parents of the importance of play and the need to protect children from being pressured into academic activities too early.

Wallet (2006:36) notes that ECE teacher training programmes consist of three core components that should be well balanced: (i) subject-matter studies that provide teachers with the subject (content) and knowledge base that they will in turn transmit to their learners, (ii) pedagogical studies provide teachers with the skills they require to effectively practise their profession and (iii) in-class teaching experience is an academically organised opportunity for teachers to practice teaching in a classroom, while being supervised by a qualified and experienced professional. However, despite the importance of content knowledge and a specialised knowledge base, Ackerman (2006:87) and McLaughlin (2002:95) are in accord that more and better content knowledge does not guarantee that teachers will know how to use it effectively in their classrooms. Instead, teachers need to know how to engage their learners in content knowledge, how to allocate time and attention, as well as how to articulate standards for practice. Similarly, the OECD (2006:8) argues that the focus of early childhood teaching and learning should be on the child and the developmental tasks and learning strategies of young children.

McLaughlin (2002:97) recommends that teachers need pedagogical knowledge to develop new ideas, skills and perspectives, to evaluate, enrich and change their practice, to exploit external knowledge, to situate knowledge in their particular school workplace, and to understand the need for new ways of doing things. Knowledge of pedagogical methods is also important since it has the potential to enable teachers to identify problem areas in their practice, as well as opportunities for inquiry and innovation. At a personal level,

pedagogy could be useful if it is used to inform individual teacher action and reflection and to guide teachers to use resources to enhance their work (McLaughlin 2002:97).

ECE teachers who participated in Lobman and Ryan's (2007) study identified innate dispositions required by ECE teachers for the caring and social-emotional aspects of teaching. These authors concluded that a bachelor's degree and specialised training in ECE should be the minimum qualification and that teachers need communication and interpersonal skills to be able to work effectively with other adults (Lobman & Ryan 2007:377). Teacher training programmes should be monitored to ensure that higher education institutions produce suitably qualified teachers. Legislating linkages between the content of professional development and preparation programmes, and national standards should be considered.

2.4.3 How ECE Teachers Work

ECE teachers' practice is multidimensional since it involves personal, social and cultural contexts, as well as extensive emotional labour (Goodfellow 2008:21). Nevertheless, ECE teachers' work is often undervalued and they are vulnerable to being exploited due to the perception that their role is equivalent to 'mothering' (Goodfellow 2008:21). Ironically, although they are under-rated, ECE teachers create positive relationships through warm, sensitive and responsive care that helps children feel valued and enables them to gain more from their learning experiences (NAEYC 1993). Teachers should focus on children's well-being, and their early development and learning should be ECE teachers' primary concern (OECD 2006).

Walsh *et al.* (2006) note that ECE teachers provide children with a safe, secure and inviting learning environment, help them to feel valued and take time to listen to their views and opinions. ECE teachers promote children's self-esteem, confidence, independence, imagination and general well-being; they understand how children learn and what constitutes significant learning by considering learning preferences, and they are aware of children's uniqueness (Hirsh-Pasek *et al.* 2009:44). ECE teachers foster positive attitudes learning and avoid frustration by teaching at a pace suitable for the individual child as well as the class as a whole. In this way, ECE teachers are able to meet the needs of all children by stretching the more able and supporting the less capable. Theories of best practice and current research findings illustrate that ECE teachers should be actively

involved and sensitive when interacting with young children (Wilcox-Hertzog & Ward 2004:1).

ECE teachers have traditionally created their own curricula (Lobman & Ryan 2007:371). Mandated curricula tend to be not only prescriptive, but are often overloaded, resulting in ECE teachers needing to cover more curriculum content than previously (Hacker & Rowe 1998:95). The intensification of their work means that instead of being programme implementers, teachers also need to be programme planners and designers (Brophy 1982:5). However, the inherent complexities of teaching limit the degree to which teachers are able to actively make curriculum decisions when they use commercially produced curriculum materials.

Teachers still have input through school curriculum committees, and individual teachers still adapt officially adopted curricula according to their own educational beliefs and their perceptions about their students' needs. It remains important for teachers to know how to select and adapt curriculum materials for their students (Brophy 1982:11).

Coburn and Stein (2006:25) attribute the shortcomings of educational policy implementation to limitations in teacher learning. Policy makers design professional development programmes according to a vision of instruction that departs substantially from teachers' existing practice. This fails to recognise that teachers understand new forms of instruction through the lens of their pre-existing knowledge, beliefs and experiences. Thus, teachers tend to gravitate toward approaches that are congruent with their prior practices, and focus on "surface manifestations" such as discrete activities, materials and classroom organisation rather than deeper pedagogical principles. They graft new approaches onto existing practices without altering classroom norms and routines.

According to Bottery (2006:95) teachers' work is increasingly controlled through excessive standardisation. Falk (2000:104) recommends that teachers acquire a broader vision as they develop a curriculum that extends beyond meeting standards. Teachers should therefore locate their learners at the centre of the curriculum, give them opportunities to construct their own understanding through active involvement, encourage them to explore, question, hypothesise and argue about their ideas. Since few teachers have experienced this kind of education themselves, they are unable to relate to these abstract learning theories (Falk 2000).

In South Africa prior to 2001, there was a policy vacuum and government involvement in ECE programmes was limited. ECE organisations initiated their own training and developed curricula for young children. Yet despite their experience in curriculum development, they were not consulted on the adoption of the official curriculum, were not represented on the NCS writing teams, and were initially not included in professional development programmes offered by the national Department of Education. This exclusion may have affected their response to the curriculum changes implemented—this hypothesis is further explored in this study.

2.5 ECE Curriculum Delivery and Instructional Practice

There is a rich diversity of approaches to ECE curricula and pedagogy (Woodhead 2006). Historically in South Africa such diversity may be attributed to the marginalised nature of the field and the former absence of government involvement. As noted earlier, community-based and non-governmental organisations established ECE centres and initiated training programmes for teachers (Clasquin-Johnson 2007). Contemporary programmes continue to promote a diversity of approaches as an attempt to address context-specific needs. ECE curriculum delivery reflects policy priorities such as early stimulation, the need to link to brain research, prevention and early intervention to overcome learning breakdown, meeting the needs of children regarded as being “at risk” or vulnerable, children living in poverty, and those infected or affected by HIV/Aids (Department of Education 2001).

Any specification of early childhood services, curriculum and pedagogy reflects particular combinations of cultural assumptions and aspirations, as well as patterns of power that characterise the relationships between governments, children, families and professionals (Woodhead 2006:5). The majority of ECE curricula are individualised, play-based and child-centred, western developmental theory still predominates.

Biersteker’s (2007) recent research on non-centre-based ECE demonstrates that the majority of young children are being catered for outside government-supported programmes or community-based ECE centres. Biersteker (2007:9) notes that the flexibility of professional development programmes for teachers promotes the use of a range of curricula because registered ECE qualifications and standards are outcomes-based and flexible. ECE curricula in South Africa follow a strengths-based, holistic approach with a strong human rights focus. In addition, the range of content suggests that there have been attempts to incorporate indigenous or contextualised elements in

curricula for young children, but not much is known about what this means in practice (Biersteker 2007:9).

Davin and Van Staden (2005:8,25) recommend that the Grade R curriculum should be informal, enjoyable, well planned, relevant to the learners' life world, and should integrate the eight learning areas in developmentally appropriate activities. The eight learning areas are Languages, Mathematics, Natural Sciences, Technology, Social Sciences, Arts and Culture, Life Orientation, and Economic and Management Sciences. The main design features of each learning area are learning outcomes and assessment standards. The curriculum should focus on the three main Learning Programmes, namely Literacy, Numeracy and Life Skills, while following an integrated approach that promotes the development of the whole learner in terms of intellectual, physical, emotional, perceptual and language development.

2.5.1 Child-centred and Community-based Models

During the 1980s, evidence emerged about the long-term benefits of ECE programmes and a developmental perspective drawing on insights from developmental research, namely the advocacy of informal, holistic, child-centred, play-based settings (Woodhead 2006:5). Such settings include (i) recognising the early years as a distinctive phase in children's development; (ii) promoting "developmentally appropriate" policies and practices; (iii) avoiding developmental risks for the "hurried child"; (iv) recognising the formative significance of early childhood; and (v) determining the impact of early experiences on children's futures.

Furthermore, research into early brain development has highlighted the significance of the pre-natal period and the importance of adequate nutrition, responsive care, and a supportive environment (Rushton 2001:76). The evidence from developmental neuroscience therefore indicates the need for a more comprehensive ECE strategy (Blair 2002:111), encompassing the welfare of children and families from well before birth as well as early intervention, rather than a focus on the pre-school years as prioritised by current ECE policies. Early intervention is aimed at children "at risk" and includes children who are vulnerable in terms of their health, social competence and susceptibility to neglect or abuse. This paradigm can be applied to a range of adversities including natural disasters, family poverty and breakdown, and HIV/Aids. The goal of early intervention (and early prevention) is the achievement of social and economic change. The latter approach

commonly justifies early childhood programmes in terms of ensuring school readiness, equalising opportunities and promoting social justice (Woodhead 2005). This constitutes the underpinning rationale for ECE.

International ECE strategies have been widely challenged for their assumption that the norms, goals and expectations for young children's development, care and socialisation in western settings can be transferred to diverse societies with different cultural traditions and child rearing practices (Woodhead 2006). This objection is pertinent to South Africa since policy borrowing is a prominent feature of curriculum change (Jansen 1999). Hargreaves and Shirley (2009:19) liken policy borrowing to "stealing skeletons from other people's closets". Woodhead (2006:5) further contends that the dominant developmental paradigm, expressed within policy statements about "developmentally appropriate practices" is problematic since it bears little resemblance to the realities of the lives of millions of the world's children. Moreover, the idealised assumptions about what constitutes a quality environment¹⁵ for early childhood, although widespread, are based on narrow cultural assumptions about what constitutes quality in early childhood. Woodhead (2006) has therefore offered an alternative term, "Contextually Appropriate Practice" (CAP), to focus attention on the many respects in which early childhood policies, services, curricula and practices must accommodate the circumstances of children's lives, as well as the material and cultural resources available to parents and communities and their expectations and aspirations for their young children.

The belief of advocates of play-based ECE is that young children's thinking and learning practices are qualitatively different from those of adults (Walsh, Sproule, McGuinness, Trew, Rafferty & Sheehy 2006:202). The ECE curriculum should therefore be commensurate with children's age and developmental status. Walsh *et al.* (2006) explain how the former prescriptive curriculum for reading, writing and arithmetic in Northern Ireland focused too heavily and too early on academic achievement, lacked relevance and coherence for everyday life, detracted from children's enjoyment of school, negatively affected their motivation to learn, and diminished their experiences of childhood. Believing that children should instead be free to explore, experiment and learn at their own pace through play and practical activities, a curriculum review led to the adoption of the Enriched Curriculum in Northern Ireland in 1999. The new Northern Irish curriculum is

¹⁵ As reflected in the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS) developed by Harms and Clifford (1980).

based on European and South-East Asian ECE models and curriculum practices that have been strongly influenced by constructivist and Vygotskian perspectives (Walsh *et al.* 2006). It emphasises play, oral language, and phonological awareness, aimed at the development of literacy, attention, concentration and memory skills, physical confidence and competence, as well as learners' ability to build social relationships through co-operating with one another. Overall, the focus is on the process of learning rather than the content (Walsh *et al.* 2006:203). This is contrary to policy directions in many countries where early learning standards and teacher accountability are leading to the adoption of increasingly formal academic approaches.

Hirsh-Pasek *et al.* (2009:55) extend the argument of Walsh *et al.* (2006) by noting that:

The emphasis on narrowly defined learning, as promoted by the current climate of high-stakes testing and accountability, relegates play to the status of an extraneous embellishment. It treats preschoolers as if they are miniature primary school children and as if all that matters are the child's cognitive skills. It is time to define educational goals in a way that respects what research has found about the value of play and playful learning. Play is the furthest thing from a waste of children's time; it should return to its rightful place in the curriculum.

Prior to the introduction of official curricula, teachers regarded play as the core of the early childhood curriculum. Hirsh-Pasek *et al.* (2009) assert that teachers are unable to relate the philosophy of learning through play to official curricula because they interpreted the curriculum as requiring formal instruction. Moreover, teachers are uncertain of how to implement early learning standards without focusing primarily on knowledge and skills. Educational goals in particular need to reflect research findings on how children learn and how they should be taught.

2.5.2 A Formal Academic Approach

While there is agreement that teachers should purposefully create and maintain the context to stimulate and facilitate children's development and learning (Hsueh & Barton 2005:179), teachers are increasingly using formal approaches at a younger age (Fromberg 2006:70; Hatch, Bowman, Jor'dan, Morgan, Hart, Soto, Lubeck & Hyson 2002:442). There is also a growing expectation for individual children to produce evidence of "readiness for learning" (Groark, Mehaffie, McCall & Greenberg 2007:7) or "school readiness" (Davin & Van Staden 2005:6). Furthermore, Davin and Van Staden (2005) assert that school

readiness is not an isolated outcome and that Grade R teachers should aim to develop the child as a whole person in preparation not only for school, but also for life. Similarly, Elkind (1982) and Smith and Shepard (1998:307) argue that children should be protected from a curriculum that is too advanced for their individual levels of readiness.

Cassidy, Mims, Rucker and Boone (2003:194) extend this critique of school readiness by noting that the concept of readiness cannot be addressed by focusing exclusively on children. The school setting must be ready to allow children and teachers to experience success. Palermo, Hanish, Martin, Fabes and Reiser (2007:407) stress the role of the ECE teacher as a crucial contributor to young children's readiness for school. In addition, the ECE teacher should maximise the quality of the classroom environment, which is associated positively with children's long-term school adjustment. For example, children who experience warmer and closer teacher-child relationships, tend to have fewer behaviour problems, enjoy school more, and perform better academically than children who experience more conflicted or dependent teacher-child relationships. Consequently, the quality of the teacher-child relationship is an important correlating factor with children's school readiness and should be optimised to promote young children's academic readiness (Murphey 2003:3; Palermo *et al.* 2007:420).

With the introduction of official curricula, ECE programmes in many countries are becoming increasingly formal, rigid and academic. Blaustein (2005:5) argues that the real risk of the academic readiness approach is that the "directed academic curriculum" often replaces essential, hands-on learning activities with skill-based performance and rote learning tasks. In doing so, the developmental growth necessary for children's future academic success is put at risk. When rote learning tasks are introduced in an early childhood classroom, they condition a child to concentrate on a very specific skill and use lower parts of the brain, such as the limbic system and the insufficiently developed cerebral cortex, to learn that skill. During this type of task, the child is forced to use parts of the brain trained to perform a task, rather than later when the cortex system becomes more developed and better suited to the task (Hearly 2004). Balanced developmental brain growth is crucial if a young child is to gain a broad base of knowledge and meaningful understanding.

While some adult-directed or facilitated activities, such as reading stories, singing songs, and group dictation, are appropriate, a traditional adult-directed academic curriculum is largely inappropriate in early childhood learning environments. According to Hearly (2004),

adult-directed activities place the emphasis on the teacher's goals. Children are expected to tackle problems that are often unrelated to their environment or concrete experiences. As a result, there are gaps in the development of their reasoning and logic. Such an approach fails to respect the child's individual objectives or allow the child to use intrinsic motivations to engage in learning. More seriously, it jeopardizes a child's attitude or disposition toward learning. In addition, adult-directed activities limit opportunities for a child to practise and develop essential non-academic abilities. They reduce opportunities for the child to understand essential relationships between experiences and peers or to test newly learned concepts in his or her environment. This in turn decreases the development of the intuitive foundation of knowledge needed for complex abstract thinking in the future. It also places pressure on young children and forces them to use immature neural pathways to complete prescribed tasks (Blaustein 2005).

As a proponent of the play-based approach, I concur with Blaustein's (2005) and Fromberg's (2006) reviews of early learning environments that focus on academic achievement. Teachers implementing formal ECE curricula believe that the best way to prepare young children for school success is through formal instruction, worksheets and skill drills (Hirsh-Pasek *et al.* 2009:13). Teachers employing these strategies predetermine the most relevant information and attempt to force young children to focus in ways that most of them are simply too immature to fulfill. Although unintended, the consequence is often children with low confidence and negative dispositions toward learning (Blaustein 2005:2). Similarly, Fromberg (2006:70) notes that in the USA public policies emphasising high-stakes summative testing of information and skills have resulted in the reduction of the socialisation and child-centred traditions and the intellectual/experiential orientations required in early childhood programmes. Similarly, in South Africa, the ECE programmes are becoming increasingly formal since the introduction of the official curriculum, the NCS even though learners have not had early stimulation in pre-reception year programmes.

2.5.3 Early Learning Standards

Early learning standards are a central feature of standards-based curriculum change aimed at helping all students to achieve. Wilson and Lowenberg-Ball (2006:122) note that:

[Teachers] must teach in the direction of the new curricular standards and meet the performance standards embedded in teacher assessment systems. They must help their students meet the standards for learning outcomes, preparing them for much more open-ended and ambiguous assessment that examines, at

a much finer level, what students have learned. They must demonstrate, select, and design good classroom learning tasks, teach more complex content to deeper levels of understanding, and cover the curriculum.

Despite criticisms that learning standards are leading teachers to adopt increasingly formal teaching approaches, the NAEYC (2004) believes that early learning standards have the potential to establish a comprehensive, high-quality system of services for young children. They however acknowledge that early learning standards are often implemented in ways that are problematic. Rather, standards should emphasise significant, developmentally appropriate content and outcomes, be developed and reviewed through informed, inclusive processes, and be implemented and assessed in ways that support the development of all young children, including those with special needs (Darragh 2007:168). In addition, early learning standards should be accompanied by strong support for early childhood programmes, professionals and families.

While ECE standards were initially welcomed by practitioners in the ECE field with its long history of establishing and advocating standards for young learners, standards have recently become more complex and confusing because of their accountability demands (Goldstein 2006:2; Scott-Little, Kagan & Frelow 2003:1; Scott-Little, Lesko, Martella & Milburn 2006:2). Love (2006:15), asserts that the benefits of well-applied ECE standards include programme improvement, positive curriculum change, enhanced professional development, and more effective resource allocation. ECE standards facilitate monitoring trends over time and may lead to enhanced support for ECE programmes. Results-based accountability is therefore regarded as an essential part of a broader strategy to improve outcomes for children (Friedman 2004:14).

2.5.4 Assessment

Accurately assessing individual children's knowledge and skills is one of the most difficult, yet most important skills in teaching (Chen & McNamee 2006:111). To do so, teachers need reliable assessment systems to help identify learners' strengths, identify areas that require additional practice and instruction, monitor their progress, and decide on appropriate next steps in their instructional practice (Wilson & Loewenberg-Ball 1996:127). Understanding assessment and knowing how to use it appropriately is crucial to effective teaching. Assessment in early childhood classrooms is particularly challenging because young children's competencies are situation-dependent and they do not respond well to the constraints of standardised testing.

The problem with changing accountability requirements linked to new assessment procedures is that these measures increase external technical control over teachers, decrease their autonomy, and lead to an intensification of their work (Ballet *et al.* 2006:210). Day (2008:244,258) regards such “performity agendas” as alienating and bureaucratically managerial. Moreover, Bottery (2006:108) notes that:

There is abundant evidence that this kind of approach, linked to systems of targets and performity, not only generates poor morale in those made so accountable, but also fails to understand, appreciate, value and encourage other aspects of professional practice which make educational practice successful.

Ongoing classroom assessment is believed to be a more accurate method of data collection and evaluation (Davin & Van Staden 2005:225) than tests. While observation and documentation are at the heart of such assessment, teachers may not know specifically what to observe and/or what to document. Having gathered observations, a further challenge for teachers is what to do with the assessment findings, and how to use them to inform their teaching. To serve diverse groups of learners, teachers need assessment tools that help them to identify children’s strengths and weaknesses in a wide variety of learning areas. For results to be meaningful in the classroom, the assessment must measure the skills and knowledge in areas similar to those used by teachers in planning the curriculum (Davin & Van Staden 2005).

Using assessment to guide children’s learning and development requires expertise in child development knowledge, subject knowledge and pedagogical knowledge (Chen & McNamee 2006: 124). Assessment should guide curriculum development and curriculum implementation should be supported by assessment information (Grisham-Brown *et al.* 2006:45). As teachers implement learning experiences, they use assessment activities to evaluate the effectiveness of instruction. Children’s participation in curricular experiences raises questions in a teacher’s mind that prompt taking a closer look at their progress with learning and the nature of activities offered to them.

If effectively implemented, early learning standards have the potential to make ethical, appropriate, valid and reliable assessment a central part of all early childhood programmes. Teachers are responsible for applying the standards to assess young children’s strengths, progress and needs, as well as using assessment methods that are developmentally appropriate (NAEYC 2004:1). Grisham-Brown, Hallam and Brookshire

(2006:46) assert that high quality assessment of young children should include the following characteristics: (i) be conducted within naturalistic environments; (ii) use multiple methods; (iii) connect the intent of the assessment with the way it is used; and (iv) enable the participation of families in the assessment process. Moreover, researchers agree that assessments that reflect the goals of the programme and link to the curriculum will enable children to make significant progress (Grisham-Brown, Hallam & Brookshire 2006:46).

2.5.5 Accountability

According to Meisels (2006:1) politicians, policy makers, journalists and scholars are all focused on outcomes, or on “what works”. Day (2008:243) contends that teachers’ work is occurring in the context of increasingly intensive and persistent results-driven policy interventions to ensure higher standards of teaching, learning and achievement as well as increased efficiency and effectiveness. The establishment of formal curricula and accountability through the school system has moved the ECE sector in many countries firmly into the public arena (Woodrow & Brennan 1999:90). Consequently, the expectations of the ECE curriculum, children’s learning outcomes and accountability have undergone dramatic change (Goldstein 2006:2) and the underlying motivation for introducing mandated curricula is to raise standards (Kwon 2002:11).

Standardised tests are increasingly being used to measure achievement and school performance, and to meet accountability demands (Jaruszewicz 2005:362). In particular, cross-national test comparisons of children’s performance in narrowly defined academic arenas, for example the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) and the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) are impacting ECE curricula worldwide (Botha, Maree & De Witt 2005:697; Kennedy 2006:299). The results of PIRLS, which found that South African learners scored the lowest out of 40 countries in their reading ability, and the public outcry that followed, may have a far-reaching impact on Grade R programmes and reinforce the perception that children should be learning these skills at a younger age and in more formal ways.

Black and William’s (2005:249) assertion that faith in the education system is considerably undermined by unfavourable international comparisons is pertinent. In particular, it causes taxpayers and parents to question the effectiveness of the education system (Polyzoi, Fullan & Anchan 2003:21). They often blame teachers for the poor quality of education, treating them as scapegoats for other parties who may be responsible for the prevailing

conditions in education (Cochran-Smith 2006:24). Similarly, Nieto (2005:141) notes that an economic imperative has been at the heart of the majority of reform initiatives and that increased “high-stakes” testing has resulted in schools, teachers and learners being the primary targets of blame for poor achievement. According to Fink and Stoll (2005:17), this is a common governmental change strategy to undermine the public’s confidence in its schools and teachers, thus allowing policy makers to mandate a series of new policies. This approach effectively deskills teachers and undermines their judgement.

A common motivation from policy makers for curriculum change is that teachers and schools need to improve learner achievement (Smith & Rowley 2005:126). According to Harlen (2005:209) and Falk (2000:92), teachers consequently experience curriculum change in overtly negative ways, for example, teacher evaluation policies are being connected to teacher professional development, which in turn is primarily geared towards enhancing student learning. In addition, high stakes summative assessment impacts significantly on the curriculum and teachers become more test orientated than learning orientated (Cochran-Smith 2006:23; Harlen 2005:209). In particular, teachers focus on the content of tests, administer repeated practice tests, train learners in the answers to specific types of questions, adopt transmission styles of teaching and neglect formative assessment which can enhance learning. In the USA, school districts are linking teacher salary increases to learner test scores. Moreover, there is a widespread myth that increasing the workload of teachers results in enhanced effectiveness (Harlen 2005:209). Although teaching time has significantly increased in the UK, it has not resulted in an overall improvement in standards. Accountability is being enforced through new data systems, which allow for comparisons between schools. This fails to reflect the complexities of schooling or a particular school’s overall education and programme goals.

Ndawi and Peasuh (2005:211) argue that since a significant number of teachers in developing countries such as Zimbabwe are unqualified, they cannot be held accountable for producing citizens who are able to meet societal expectations. In addition, teachers need professional development in the area of assessment and standards to understand and apply the principles of standards in school-based assessment (Chirume 2007:39).

2.5.6 Curriculum planning

The *Teacher’s Guide for the Development of Learning Programmes for the Foundation Phase* (National Department of Education 2003) stipulates that lesson plans should form

part of a broader planning process across learning programmes, consisting of whole phase planning, work schedules involving year-long or grade planning, and lesson planning including groups of activities. According to the guidelines, learning programmes should be translated into year-long, grade specific work schedules and shorter activity-long lesson plans (National Department of Education 2003:2).

Lesson plans describe concretely and in detail teaching, learning and assessment activities that are to be implemented as a single activity or through a term's teaching, learning and assessment and may last from a day to a week or a month. Lesson plans include how teachers should manage teaching, learning and assessment activities. Significantly, whole phase curriculum planning by Grade R teachers should be undertaken in cooperation with their Foundation Phase colleagues who teach Grades 1 to 3, in order to ensure that resourcing and progression from Grade R to Grade 3 are addressed (National Department of Education 2003:5).

In addition, the Gauteng Department of Education (2008) requires Grade R teachers to follow Circular 28/2005 (see Appendix 1) when planning their lessons. A review of the *Teacher's Guide for the Development of Learning Programmes* reveals that considerable emphasis is placed on how teachers plan their lessons.

We are convinced that teachers implementing Curriculum 2005 have gained skills, experience, knowledge and techniques that have provided them with a base for engaging with the Revised National Curriculum Statement Grades R-9 (Schools). This *Teacher's Guide for the Development of Learning Programmes* builds on and enhances that base (National Department of Education 2003:5).

Despite the viewpoint above expressed in the Guidelines, teachers often lack the capacity to develop their own learning programmes. Since Grade R teachers generally have lower levels of qualifications, their capacity may be even lower.

2.6 Teachers as the Implementers of Change

The ability to deal with change is vital to living in post-modern society (Fullan 1993:3). The educational system is fundamentally conservative (as evidenced by the way teachers are trained, the way schools are organised, the ways that the educational hierarchy operates, and the way that education is treated by political decision makers). This trend consequently results in a system that is more likely to retain the status quo than to change.

Therefore, when change is attempted it often results in defensiveness, superficiality or short-lived pockets of success. According to Fullan (1993), it is impossible to have an educational environment in which change is continually expected, alongside a conservative system, without constant aggravation.

Teachers therefore find themselves working in a deeply paradoxical profession where, on the one hand, they are hailed as the catalysts of change, the harbingers of the new informational society, the creators of knowledge and learning on which success in this society will depend. This is why so much is expected of them and why so much change is demanded from them ... At the very same time, they are expected to work better and harder, teachers also find themselves more restricted, more regulated and less supported to do their work (Fullan 1993).

In addition, teachers need to understand the broader context of educational change. Hargreaves and Shirley (2009), trace the impact of standards on curricula over the past fifty years. They explain how schools' and teachers' responses to change are influenced by the features of educational change. However, this is not a linear process: different schools could be at different stages depending on their infrastructural conditions. According to these authors, decentralisation was the main feature of the first stage since teachers were afforded professional freedom to interpret outcomes and standards. This gradually progressed to centralisation during the second stage where teachers had to follow prescribed content and curriculum change was compliance driven. During the third stage, creative combinations sought to balance autonomy with accountability. The current focus of curriculum change is on inclusive and sustainable partnerships between schools, communities and the corporate sector being promoted, and strong schools are helping their weaker peers (Hargreaves & Shirley 2009).

2.7 Evaluation of previous research on teachers' responses to curriculum change

Past research has seldom found that teachers respond to curriculum change in positive ways. For example, a study conducted in Hong Kong reported that nearly 50% of ECE teachers resigned from their teaching posts within the first six months of curriculum implementation (Wong 2003:46). The ECE teachers in this study attributed their decision to the significant increase in their workload and the tremendous stress they experienced. In addition, they interpreted the principal's supervision and intervention as an indication of

mistrust. Their lack of knowledge and skills required to implement the curriculum change, as well as the rushed time frames, led to a loss of confidence in their ability to teach.

In Bailey's (2000:113) study on mandated curriculum change in Canada, teachers' resistance to change was costly since it led to health problems, early retirement, and in one case, a nervous breakdown because teachers felt "powerless". Successful curriculum change therefore necessitates finding ways to overcome resistance and encourage engagement.

Murphy, Evertson and Radnofsky (1991:139) found that teachers are more likely to adopt curriculum change if they have more uninterrupted instructional time and if they believe that the change will benefit their learners. Datnow and Castellano (2000) found that teachers feel pressured to adopt change when their administrator is in favour of it, or because of available funding. However, Bailey (2000:120) notes that teachers' efforts to comply with mandated change are usually inadequately supported. Mwakapenda's (2001:53) study on curriculum change in Malawi, for example, found that although teachers appeared to have adopted the curriculum, very limited change occurred in their classroom practices since teachers were inadequately trained.

Since Grade R was gradually phased into the South African schooling system after 2001, research output on this grade is still relatively limited. Consequently finding related to teachers' responses to curriculum change is sparse. Three studies were found on the implementation of curriculum change in South African Grade R classrooms: Botha *et al.* (2005) focused on mathematics activities, Phatudi (2007) examined transitions from home and preschools into Grade 1, and SAIDE's (2010) study focused on the quality of South African Grade R programmes.

In the Botha *et al.* (2005) and Phatudi (2007) studies, the majority of the teachers were located at relatively well-resourced schools and the teachers had at least a bachelor's degree. Botha *et al.* (2005) found that although a particular curriculum change required teachers to specifically plan mathematics activities, teachers ignored it. Phatudi (2007) found formal activities, particularly worksheets, to be prominent in Grade R classrooms.

Botha *et al.* (2005:712) recommend "drastic measures" to adequately train teachers. Their conclusion that Grade R learners "will probably never be able to take their rightful place in society, perpetuating the vicious cycle of inadequate education" (Botha *et al.* 2005:712) fails to acknowledge that ECE teachers are operating under severe capacity constraints.

Placing the onus for professional development on teachers themselves relieves pressure on the state. However, effective implementation of curriculum change is undermined by our continued reliance on underqualified teachers. The Department of Education's own studies, for example the Final Report on the National ECD Pilot Project (1999) and the Nationwide Audit of ECD (2001) confirm that the sector is underdeveloped and under-resourced.

In the SAIDE (2010) study, three recent South African studies were reviewed: (i) the Eastern Cape Department of Education's (2008) evaluation of accredited ECE training, (ii) the Gauteng Department of Education's (2009) study on the implementation of the NCS in the Foundation Phase, and (iii) the National Treasury's Technical Assistance Unit's (2008) Grade R Diagnostic Project. These studies were in accord that the focus of Grade R programmes was on numerical targets rather than quality. In the Eastern Cape study it was found that quality of the majority of Grade R programmes in that province was so poor that it was actually harmful to the well-being of children and that schools were not ready to incorporate children into the reception year.

SAIDE (2010:4) recommends that the quality of Grade R programmes be addressed urgently since it constitutes the first experience of school for most children. The most significant recommendation related to the Grade R curriculum was that it should provide a bridge into formal learning with an emphasis on providing continuous early development on the birth to nine continuum rather than strictly being incorporated into formal schooling and having the same curriculum components as Grade 1. In addition a "common core standard content" is recommended for Grade R teacher training (SAIDE 2010:5).

It could therefore be concluded that previous research has found that teachers often respond to change in negative ways because of a lack of capacity and support. However, previous research also informs us of factors that influence teachers' responses to curriculum change. Therefore, if policy makers want teachers to adopt or adapt curriculum change, they should provide the conditions that will be conducive to change, particularly access to professional development opportunities, a range of support mechanisms as well as resources. This in turn will positively influence teachers' motivation, job satisfaction and attitudes towards the curriculum change.

2.8 Factors that Influence Teachers' Responses to Curriculum Change

McLaughlin's (1987) study on the external factors (professional development, resources, support) and the internal factors (attitudes, beliefs, motivation) that influence how teachers respond to curriculum change is used to organise this section of the literature review. While external factors can be addressed, e.g. training can be provided, internal factors that underlie an implementer's response are less amenable to policy intervention. In the next section, I will first discuss the external factors in detail, followed by the internal factors. These factors overlap since they shape and are influenced by one another.

2.8.1 External Factors

Organisational conditions and characteristics of the infrastructure, which facilitate the successful implementation of change, constitute an organisation's (school's) innovative capacity (Leithwood & Jantzi 2006:206). According to Cochran-Smith (2006:24) the current emphasis on teacher quality positions teachers as the determining factor in learners' success. This disregards complex variables such as school resources, leadership, investment in teachers' capacity building and professional development, as well as learner factors such as family structure and economic status.

Teacher capacity relates to professional development, resources and support, including sustained technical support (Bascia & Hargreaves 2000:19). Ryan and Ackerman (2005:2) note that successful implementation of educational change depends on both capacity and will. If implementation actors lack adequate levels of information, skills or resources, their capacity to successfully implement the required curriculum change will be limited. According to Fullan (1993:5), teachers require inbuilt capacity, or the habits and skills to engage in continuous corrective analysis and action. However, capacity extends beyond individual teachers, to schools and districts (Ryan & Ackerman 2005). Productive educational change is related not to teachers' capacity to implement the latest policy, but rather to their ability to survive the vicissitudes of planned and unplanned change while growing and developing.

2.8.1.1 Professional Development

Kwakman (1999 in Slegers *et al.* 2002:91) defines professional development as "the process in which individual teachers acquire new knowledge, skills and values for the constant improvement of the quality of their services". This challenge demands reflection, interaction, translating new developments and insights into practice, reflecting on personal

performance, keeping abreast of relevant literature, participating in training activities, and experimenting with a range of didactic methods. All this however, is implemented in the school workplace, which is the most complex domain in which to foster professional development. Consequently, teacher professional development is viewed as “the best solution and worst problem in education” (Fullan 1993:7). As a result, curriculum change, which is often intended to increase the effectiveness of teachers, has the converse effect when teachers “avoid the challenge of change” (Richardson & Placier 2001:905). Thus curriculum change often undermines teachers and their capacity to implement change effectively.

One indicator of high quality ECE is a qualified teaching workforce (Ryan & Ackerman 2005:2). According to Clark and Huber (2005:179) professional development is an important aspect of educational reform. In the ECE field, professional development programmes are complicated by inconsistencies in government requirements for teachers, high turnover rates, and a proliferation of new knowledge in the field of brain development and its application to ECE programmes. Increasing attention is being paid to both initial and continuing ECE teacher professional development. The role of universities includes providing high-quality teacher preparation, enhanced student learning, professional development opportunities and research interventions (Clark & Huber 2005:181).

Professional development is a priority for policy makers since they believe that better educated teachers provide higher quality care and education (Torquati *et al.* 2007:262). Moreover, research confirms that ongoing professional development is central to the successful implementation of curriculum change (Datnow & Castellano 2000:777; Marchel & Keenan 2005:332; Penuel *et al.* 2007:922; Wilson & Loewenberg-Ball 2006:134; Woodrow & Brennan 1999:89), particularly since effective teachers are the most critical factor for quality ECE (Chen & Chang 2006:1). The key to sustained teacher effectiveness and continuous growth is high-quality ongoing professional development (Chen & Chang 2006).

The National Association for the Education and Care of Young Children (NAEYC 2004:1) notes that an effective system of early childhood professional development should provide meaningful opportunities for career advancement and increased compensation to ensure a well-qualified and stable workforce. In the majority of countries, early childhood professionals enter the field through various paths. While some have completed professional preparation programmes prior to assuming a professional role, many others

embark on formal professional preparation once employed as ECE teachers. Ongoing professional development opportunities should encourage and support all individuals working with young children to improve their knowledge and skills (NAEYC 1993:4). Effective professional development is needed to change teachers' classroom practice and facilitate their understanding of new curricula (Ryan & Ackerman 2005:2).

Due to the impact of new learning theories such as constructivism, teachers are expected to change their attitudes towards their work. This is extremely difficult when teachers are expected to apply what they learn without adequate support in the form of continuous professional development programmes. Professional development in the ECE field should be an ongoing process (NAEYC 1993). The NAEYC (1993) and Firestone *et al.* (2005:415) agree that professional development is most effective when grounded in a sound theoretical and philosophical base and structured as a coherent and systematic programme. In addition, professional development experiences should respond to an individual's background and experience, as well as the context of their current role. Effective professional development opportunities should be structured to promote clear linkages between theory and practice and should be active, interactive and hands-on. This does not only encourage participants to learn from one another, it also incorporates prior skills and resources they bring to the training process, rather than creating feelings of self-doubt or inadequacy by immediately calling into question an individual's current practices. Effective professional development experiences provide opportunities for application and reflection and allow individuals to be observed and receive feedback on what they have learned. Professional development programmes are especially effective when participants are afforded the opportunity to be involved in the planning and design of the programmes (Firestone *et al.* 2005).

Training programmes focused on specific content (e.g. literacy or numeracy) do not necessarily support the process of teacher development. Teachers' professional development should therefore be located within a larger coordinated system and related to their daily work, rather than being a top-down mandate with little relevance to their current needs (Ackerman 2006:2; Boote 2006:470). Penuel, Fishman, Yamaguchi and Gallagher (2007:928) assert that reform oriented professional development includes being mentored and coached, participating in a committee or study group, or engaging in an internship, since workshops alone do not allow teachers to explore new concepts and teaching strategies in sufficient depth. Mentoring and coaching activities are more effective because

they are led by classroom teachers, whom other teachers trust as a source of meaningful guidance on improving teaching practice (Hargreaves 1994).

Curriculum-linked professional development focuses specifically on how to enact pedagogical strategies, use materials and administer assessments associated with particular curricula. Penuel *et al.*, (2007:929) stress that professional development that is of long-term duration is more likely to contain the kinds of learning opportunities necessary for teachers to integrate new knowledge into their practice. Ongoing professional education for teachers recognises that professional growth is a developmental process that continues throughout a teacher's career (Chen & Chang 2006:8; National Department of Education 2007). Therefore, a "whole teacher approach" is required to facilitate the full range of teacher development needs, offering programmes that support teachers to progress from novice to expert levels of competence (Chen & Chang 2006). Laverick (2007:248) reminds us that motivation, metacognition, mentors and money are ingredients for promoting expertise which demonstrate commitment to teachers' professional development.

In South Africa, Grade R teachers are required to undergo training at the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) Level 4. This is a vocational qualification equivalent to Grade 12 of schooling. Teachers' access to professional development is uneven, both geographically and in terms of access to higher qualification levels starting at Level 5 (Biersteker 2007:10). Biersteker (2007) recommends that the shortcomings of ECE teachers' professional development programmes in South Africa could be addressed through distance learning, satellite campuses, and increased allocations for learnerships and skills programmes in remote and underserviced areas. Biersteker (2007) further recommends that the state considers offering incentives for undertaking degrees and postgraduate studies in ECE to increase the take-up of these opportunities. Moreover, the current requirements for access to higher education institutions for learners who have completed Level 4 and Level 5 need to be addressed urgently so that vertical progression is enabled and achievements credited. Key challenges at all levels of training relate to current low language and literacy levels of many ECE teachers (Biersteker 2007).

ECE teachers need to create their own professional development goals and take personal responsibility for their learning and growth (Clark & Huber 2005:183). Professional development programmes should therefore get teachers actively involved in reflecting on their teaching, asking questions about practice, and sharing what they are learning with

each other. The same authors found that professional development resulted in a significant change in how teachers view themselves and their roles, and that professional development has fostered a sense of belonging to a profession.

Smylie and Perry (2005:329) argue that teacher professional development programmes should be extended to include new learning opportunities, such as work groups, planning teams, and team teaching as sources of exchange, collegial problem solving, and learning. This should be accompanied by incentives such as participative decision-making, collective responsibilities, and team structures, which enable teachers to act in ways consistent with a group. Disincentives to risk-taking and change include political divisiveness and constraints on teachers' classroom autonomy (for example, standards and mandated assessments) that reduce teacher creativity and discretion. Under such circumstances, instruction tends to be directed towards processes and outcomes, especially if teachers believe they do not serve their students well (Smylie & Perry 2005:330).

Fullan's (1993:135) assertion that the ability to manage change is an essential skill in post-modern society, shows clearly that this should be consciously addressed in training programmes for ECE teachers. Day (2008) further recommends that continuing professional development should be provided for teachers who serve disadvantaged communities. Day's (2008.) findings acknowledge that sustaining and enhancing teachers' commitment and resilience is a key quality and retention issue. Therefore, efforts to support and enhance teacher quality should focus upon building, sustaining, and retaining their commitment and resilience, as well as on curriculum-related matters.

2.8.1.2 Resources

According to UNICEF (2007:45), resources have a significant effect, since children who receive high-quality childcare in a stable, safe and stimulating environment, demonstrate stronger mathematical ability, cognitive skills and fewer behavioural problems than children who receive low-quality care. A large percentage of the 42 items on the revised edition of the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS-R) confirms that learning and teaching resources are critical for high quality ECE programmes. Learning and teaching resources must capture learners' interest and promote concrete, hands-on and interactive learning. Moreover, since learners' attention span is still limited, an extensive range of resources is required. These should be attractive, colourful, relevant, durable, as well as multicultural and free from bias.

Day (2008:244) notes that curriculum change demands more of teachers because of increased academic and social responsibilities. Teachers require additional time and resources and should be rewarded for leadership responsibilities.

2.8.1.3 Support

ECE teachers need ongoing professional support since they often struggle to maintain ideal practices when confronted with classroom reality (Noble & Macfarlane 2005:55). They also require regular and intensive one-on-one technical assistance, as well as opportunities to meet other teachers in training sessions and talk about their efforts to change (Ryan 2004:683). The professional isolation of ECE teachers limits their access to new ideas and better solutions, increases their stress levels, fails to recognise and praise success, and permits incompetence. When teachers participate in “critical collegueship” (Wood & Bennett 2000:636) they have access to professional development opportunities that support collaborative inquiry focused on learners’ understanding, and operate within a supportive context for sustained reflection on their own teaching practices, their responses to change are more likely to be positive (Pickard Kremenitzer & Myler 2006:165; Rowan & Miller 2007:255; Zahorik 1987:394; Zech, Gause-Vega, Bray, Secules & Goldman 2000:207). Ethridge and King (2005:295) argue that such systematic reflection is important for teachers to know why they do what they do. Collaboration among colleagues must, however, be balanced with the ability to think and work independently. Independence is essential for curriculum change since it allows personal reflection which in turn is necessary for teachers to cope with change (Hargreaves 1994:ix). Noble and Macfarlane (2005:55) assert that ECE teachers need strong professional networks to remain confident about their role in the pedagogical process, as well as opportunities to critically reflect on the complex nature of the workplace, share ideas, and debrief each other on issues as they arise.

Smylie and Perry (2005) found that teacher learning is enhanced by opportunities to work and learn from other teachers of similar position and status. This encourages teachers to gradually transform their practice through ongoing negotiation of meaning as they engage with one another and respond to changing conditions in their environment. The processes and dynamics of teachers’ collegial interactions create opportunities for learning that facilitate or constrain policy implementation (Coburn & Stein 2006:27; Muncey & McQuillan 1996:286). McLaughlin (2002) and Coburn and Stein (2006) are in accord that teachers need communities of practice to develop shared practices, resources, and common

perspectives. Learning occurs as teachers participate in the social and cultural activities of their communities, sharing and exchanging information (Coburn & Stein 2006:26; McLaughlin 2002:110). Collective learning opportunities increase exposure to new ideas and provide access to additional sources of feedback and referents for self-assessment (Smylie & Perry 2005:310). Open communication and collective examination of beliefs and assumptions that encourages critical reflection and innovation are essential.

In Coburn and Stein's (2006:28) view, communities of practice could support teachers in moving from working in isolation under a strong norm of privacy, towards planning lessons together, observing each other's instruction, and watching and jointly analysing videotapes of their classrooms. By establishing a collaborative culture (Gitlin & Margonis 1995:385) teachers are exposed to new ideas about curriculum and instruction. This enables them to expand their knowledge and improve their classroom practice (Smylie & Perry 2005:312). Laverick (2007:248) notes that mentors and role models help teachers to progress along a continuum of pedagogical expertise.

Walsh, Sproule, McGuinness, Trew, Rafferty and Sheehy (2006:219) argue that successful curriculum change in ECE requires substantial financial support, especially for additional training. However, the informational base as well as fiscal and moral supports required to sustain change are rarely available (Bascia & Hargreaves 2000:19). Bailey (2000:121-122) contends that "orphaning" of mandated programmes occurs when there are budgetary constraints. The overarching consequence of systemic constraints is teachers' increasing reluctance to try anything new. Some of the teachers in Bailey's (2000) study had enthusiastically supported the innovation, but while they were making paradigmatic shifts in their teaching, they found that they did not have the authority to bring about the kinds of structural changes necessary to realise the promise of those shifts. For these teachers, the process of change was frustrating because they were unable "to go all the way with the changes".

Paradoxically, Ryan and Ackerman (2005:3) argue that supports alone can be insufficient, especially when key implementers do not generate the motivation required to comply with a new policy. Furthermore, innovation takes time and energy, increases normal workload and decreases competence during initial implementation (Fullan 1991). Although policymakers rely on policy "tools" to increase motivation, the use of mandates is the most common form of policy implementation.

Such policy tools assume that individuals have the capacity to take action, but “will not be positively motivated” to take the action unless they are influenced, encouraged or coerced by tangible pay-offs. Nevertheless, the mere provision of pressures and supports does not guarantee intended outcomes, although evidence suggests that there is more likelihood of implementation when these policy tools are employed. Ryan and Ackerman (2005) note that ECE teacher development programmes have benefited from the combination of “pressure and support”—pressure through advocacy and strong leadership/expertise and support through financial resources. Significantly, Ryan and Ackerman’s (2005:9) study revealed that one-third of the teachers enrolled in some kind of professional development programme intended to leave their positions once they had completed the programme.

In South Africa, the White Paper 5 signals the government’s intention to establish one Grade R class per school, meaning that teachers receive very limited opportunities for peer support. Therefore, while the literature on professional development notes that teachers require collegial support, South African Grade R teachers often work in isolation. Besides peer support, ECE teachers need outside evaluators such as district officials, to visit their classrooms and provide feedback on their teaching (Clark & Huber 2005:182). Although ongoing support should be available from departmental officials, Phatudi, Biersteker and Joubert (2008) found that this capacity is very limited since officials are not necessarily familiar with Grade R practice.

The role of the district is crucial. Individual schools can become highly innovative for short periods of time without the district, but they cannot stay innovative without the district action to establish the conditions for continuous and long-term improvement (Noble & Macfarlane 2005).

2.8.1.4 The Role of the Principal as Instructional Leader in Fostering Curriculum Change

The success of change implementation has much to do with the quality of leadership; there is a need to develop effective leadership, particularly instructional leadership (Leithwood & Jantzi 2006:202). Similarly, Rous (2004:267) stresses that instructional leadership is an important administrative function. In-school support positively affects teachers’ commitment and effectiveness, especially if teachers view the principal as being strong, with a clear vision for the school (Day 2008:252). In a study on how teachers cope with educational change, Kilgallon *et al.* (2008:27) found that principals play a significant role in ECE teachers’ coping abilities. Principals offer teachers opportunities for professional development, facilitate networking with professional colleagues, involve them

in decision-making processes within the school, and keep them abreast of impending changes. Participants in Kilgallon *et al.*'s (2008) study also reported that their principals encouraged them to extend their role beyond the classroom and take on administrative and collaborative roles in the change process. Similarly, Rosenholtz (1989:430) argues that school principals play a pivotal role in fostering collaboration among colleagues.

However, principals should not only support teachers, they also need to be visible and be seen to appreciate teachers' efforts. According to Rosenholtz (1989:427) certain organisational features of schools could make a significant contribution to teachers' efficacy, their psychological rewards, and hence to students' learning. Such organisational features include values and patterns of interaction between teachers and principals. In particular, principals shape the organisational conditions under which teachers work, as well as the definitions of teaching they come to acquire. Moreover, principals should facilitate frequent opportunities for discussion among colleagues about the school's instructional priorities, regularly monitor teaching and learning, and provide feedback and assistance to teachers (Rosenholtz 1989:429).

Rous (2004:267) asserts that instructional leadership in ECE encompasses providing specific direction in curriculum design, implementing supervision of classroom instruction, and offering opportunities for curriculum development and professional development. Instructional leaders therefore influence teachers through (i) their ideology and their assumptions about early learning experiences for children; (ii) interpreting research and theory for teachers; and (iii) playing a critical role in assisting in reflection on curricular issues and instructional dilemmas. In a study conducted by Hertberg-Davis and Brighton (2006:90), it was found that principals encourage teachers to change by exhibiting "critical support, desire for change, belief that change is possible, and long-term vision of implementation." These authors recommend that the buy-in and enthusiasm of principals should be secured prior to introducing any curriculum change to teachers, since teachers take their cues on how to respond to change from their principals (Hertberg-Davis & Brighton 2006:100). Principals should be the first to attend training and then support teachers in their school by providing ongoing mentoring and coaching (like a master trainer).

Leithwood and Jantzi (2006:222) conducted a study on the effects of school leadership on students, teachers and their classroom practices. These authors found that principals had significant effects on teachers' classroom practices, but not on student achievement:

Although principals positively influenced teachers' motivation, capacity and work settings, there was a gulf between "practices that are 'changed' and practices that actually lead to greater pupil learning; the potency of leadership for increasing student learning hinges on the specific classroom practices which leaders stimulate, encourage, and promote.

2.8.2 Internal Factors

Much of the existing literature focuses on how affective factors such as beliefs motivation and job satisfaction, influence teachers' responses to curriculum change (Ballet & Kelchtermans 2008; Day 2008; Fullan 1993; Hargreaves 2005; Hsueh & Barton 2005; Levin 1998; Noble & Macfarlane 2005; Richardson & Placier 2002). These studies found that teachers often experience negative emotions such as fear and anxiety that influence their responses to curriculum change.

Day (2008:244) argues that there are significant negative consequences of reform on teachers' work lives and well-being. A cognitive socio-psychological theory of emotions should therefore be employed to help researchers understand how individual teachers perceive themselves and their work, and how they experience their context (Van Veen & Slegers 2006:108). Bailey (2000:123) cites empirical evidence that the context and process of mandated change often leads to the marginalisation of teachers, especially when it is not rooted in their realities and expertise. Because of curriculum change, teachers doubt their efficacy and their moral commitment to implementation may be undermined. Bailey (2000) believes that disregarding teacher demoralisation, as well as teachers' knowledge about real and sustained change, underlies implementation failure.

2.8.2.1 Beliefs and Attitudes

Since there is an integral relationship between beliefs and actions, teachers' beliefs play a major role in their decision making about curriculum and instructional tasks (Keys & Bryan 2001:635). Similarly, Wilcox-Herzog and Ward (2004:2) view teachers' beliefs as a screen through which behaviour is enacted. However, teachers form beliefs during their own schooling that create filters through which they process subsequent education and teaching experiences. These authors (Wilcox-Herzog & Ward 2004) argue that assessing teachers' beliefs and interactions could be useful in guiding them toward practice that is more appropriate with young children, because beliefs inform intentions. Moreover, intentions are a mediating factor between beliefs and actions and are the best predictor of eventual behaviour.

Teachers' beliefs are not only targets of change; they also affect change by serving as a filter through which teachers interpret new information, including curriculum content and recommendations for change (Collopy 2003:288). As teachers attempt to implement instructional practices in their classrooms, they may develop new beliefs which are essential ingredients for successful curriculum change (Mager, Myers, Maresca, Rupp & Armstrong 1986:344). Terwel (2005:660) argues that meaningful curriculum change requires new skills, behaviours and beliefs. Policy makers need to be mindful that beliefs and practices are grounded in the social and educational contexts in which teachers work (Smith & Shepard 1988:308; Van Driel, Bulte & Verloop 2007:119). Beliefs are like emotional attitudes—one can believe a proposition without realising it and there are unconscious or repressed beliefs. Furthermore, beliefs are distinct from knowledge (Smith & Shepard 1988:309).

According to Hsueh and Barton (2005:179), teachers' beliefs, values and professional behaviour play an influential role in children's early experiences at ECE centres. Differences in teachers' engagement levels and their impact on beliefs and behaviours in the classroom occur in four combinations: (i) high engagement and high impact, (ii) high engagement and moderate impact, (iii) moderate engagement and moderate impact and (iv) low engagement and low impact. For example, when teachers' philosophies contradict the assumptions underlying the practice being encouraged, the result is low engagement and low impact (Richardson & Placier 2002:909). Similarly, Fink and Stoll (2005:37) urge policymakers to pay attention to the personal and biographical influences on teachers and their work. These authors regard teachers as strategic thinkers since they make decisions on a daily basis as to what is ideal and possible in their specific contexts. They further recommend that understanding how teachers' lives affect their work would unlock how teachers relate to educational change

Paese (1996:11-13) notes that teaching behaviours are shaped by a teacher's attitudes. However, empirical evidence cited by Paese (1996) indicates that many of the effects of teacher education on attitudes and beliefs are temporary. As novice teachers are socialised into the profession, they often abandon the innovative practices and progressive attitudes developed during their pre-service experience. Paese (1996) regards teachers' sense of efficacy as a multidimensional construct, since it relates to their ability to bring about positive change in their learners and to motivate them to learn. Teachers' beliefs in their personal efficacy are positively related to their ability to maintain a secure classroom

climate, support learners' initiatives and meet the diverse needs of their learners (Gitlin & Margonis 1995:384). Teaching efficacy is defined as the belief that learners are capable of learning, regardless of their home environment, motivation or context.¹⁶

Day (2008:244) notes that accountability demands have challenged teachers' substantive identities, threatened their sense of agency and resilience, and challenged their capacities to maintain motivation, efficacy and commitment. The negative consequences of curriculum change impact on teachers' work lives and well-being. In addition, the changing definition of professional performance often conflicts with the daily practices and professional orientation of teachers. According to Perryman (2007:182), few teachers thrive under a performative regime, although managing change is clearly part of being a teacher (Mager *et al.* 1986:353). Mentor (in Mentor, Hutchinson & Ross 2002:2) found that curriculum change is directly responsible for the low morale in the teaching profession. The new assessment and accountability requirements of the curriculum were cited by Mentor (2002) as treats to teacher retention. In addition, teacher autonomy is one of the main tenets of professionalism and is essential for job satisfaction (Wilson & Loewenberg Ball 1996:128; Zech, *et al.* 2000:215). In England, Kwon (2002:8) notes that as government intervention in the curriculum has increased, so teachers' autonomy has decreased.

In a study on how change influences teachers' beliefs, Day (2008:257-258) found that change has a negative impact of teachers' commitment to their work. He recommends that policymakers should address the associations between teachers' well-being, commitment, resilience and effectiveness by providing more robust, comprehensive support structures. In addition, strategies should be developed for sustaining commitment in initial and continuing professional development programmes, which should differentiate between the needs of teachers in different phases of their professional lives. National organisations and schools particularly need to support teachers in the later stages of their career.

On a more positive note, Hsu (2008:268) found that professional development of ECE teachers in Taiwan led to the development of a positive self-concept and that teachers felt more satisfied with themselves. Most notably these teachers felt more confident to address parents' concerns about their children's learning. If teachers can be convinced of their "personal purpose" in relation to organisational change, they are more likely to support it

¹⁶ Paese (1996:13) contends that "context" includes the physical school context, affective school context, physical classroom context, affective classroom context, as well as student behaviour.

(Fullan 1993:14). Similarly, Ballet and Kelchtermans (2008:54) argue that teachers' willingness to innovate depends on their feeling supported and valued.

Since teachers are often only involved in the implementation of the curriculum change, not in the design thereof, they have very limited control over the actual improvement process (Van Veen & Slegers 2006:86) and consequently experience change as being "extremely difficult and painful" (Richardson & Placier 2002:906).

2.8.2.2 Motivation

Motivation to implement curriculum change is closely related to a teacher's personal interpretations and emotions regarding change (Slegers *et al.*, 2002:90). According to Torquati, Raikes and Huddleston-Cases (2007:262), better compensated ECE professionals are motivated to produce higher quality care and education. These authors have illustrated how motivated teachers positively impact ECE programme delivery. Since the turnover within the ECE sector remains high, teacher motivation is receiving more attention (Torquati, Raikes & Huddleston-Cases 2007:262).

Work motivation and commitment have less to do with personal qualities people bring to the workplace than the design and management of tasks within it (Rosenholtz, 1989:423). For teachers to be motivated to implement curriculum change, they require knowledge of the success of their efforts. In particular, teachers are strongly motivated by the academic success of their students and external recognition from colleagues, parents and instructional leaders because this makes their work more meaningful (Rosenholtz 1989:425).

Teachers are demotivated as a result of the "climate of accountability for quality outcomes" (Woodrow & Brennan 1999:78). In addition, the loss of professional autonomy and discretion associated with curriculum change, negatively impacts teachers' motivation (Rosenholtz 1989:424). Day (2008:247) notes that excessive workload as a result of curriculum change has a detrimental influence on teachers' motivation and commitment. In particular, teachers are demotivated due to the negative consequences of curriculum change on their work lives and well being, especially if they feel challenged to maintain a work-life balance. A feeling of career stagnation causes detachment and a loss of motivation (Day 2008:248).

Considering the importance of teacher knowledge in the implementation of the curriculum, Keys (2007:57) developed a “knowledge filter model” to promote change in teachers’ beliefs. He believes that in order to implement curriculum change, teachers’ need to be motivated to connect their new knowledge to their existing knowledge (Keys 2007:57). This requires professional dialogue, reflective teaching and coaching as well as communities of learning. Similarly Day (2008:244) and Rosenholtz (1989:430) found that teachers’ sense of efficacy is enhanced by support and trust from their instructional leaders and colleagues. This confirms that external factors impact on internal dynamics.

2.8.2.3 Job satisfaction

ECE teachers rank among the most poorly paid professionals since in most developing countries these programmes are mainly privately or community funded (Wallet 2006:34). Yetmar, Uhlenberg, May and Trew (2006:270) found that the extremely low wages paid to ECE teachers resulted in qualified staff leaving the ECE centre to work in local factories. Staff turnover had a direct effect on programme quality, causing a downward spiral. Papanastasiou and Zembylas (2006) studied job satisfaction of Grade R teachers in Cyprus and found that teachers located in public programmes were paid nearly three times the salaries of private ECE teachers. Conversely, the environment of private Grade R programmes was far better resourced compared to public Grade R programmes.

2.9 Summary and Conclusion

Awareness of the importance of early childhood education is increasing in developing countries. However, developing countries are far more focused on increasing access to ECE programmes than on the quality of such programmes (Myers 2006:7). Unlike developed countries, accountability demands are not institutionalised, although teachers are still held accountable for the success (or otherwise) of children’s learning. Myers (2006) and Jambunathan and Caulfield (2008:257) note that there is a dearth of research on ECE in developing countries. The literature on curriculum change in ECE is particularly sparse in terms of teachers’ responses to curriculum change in developing country contexts.

There is a significant gap in the literature on how internal factors influence South African ECE teachers’ responses to curriculum change. No ECE studies in South Africa have examined this phenomenon. In a study conducted by Hall, Altman, Nkomo, Peltzer and Zuma (2005:1) on (non-ECE) teachers’ job satisfaction in South Africa it was found that

curriculum change contributes significantly to teachers “frequently considering leaving their profession”. Since the mandated curriculum has an impact on teachers’ autonomy, it negatively affects job satisfaction among ECE teachers (Bottery 2006; Hacker & Rowe 1998). Hargreaves (2005:12) deserves credit for enhancing our understanding of the emotional dimensions of change since emotions are an integral part of academic learning and reasoning. Emotionally intelligent teachers have clear emotional goals for and strong emotional bonds with their learners and are therefore more likely to respond to change in positive ways. This desirable outcome demands avoiding strategies, leadership styles and work conditions that create negative emotions such as hopelessness, guilt and shame because these reduce teachers’ sense of efficacy and their ability to provide quality education for learners.

The amount of time and energy curriculum change requires impacts on the emotional lives of teachers (Hargreaves 2005:3; Van Veen & Slegers 2006:85). Since teachers are often only involved in the implementation of the curriculum change, not in the design thereof, they have very limited control over the actual improvement process (Van Veen & Slegers 2006:86) and consequently they experience change as “extremely difficult and painful” (Richardson & Placier 2002:906). This “sense of fear has replaced a sense of possibility” as a driver of change in education (Levin 1998:131). Teachers are unable to react to calls for change if these threaten their sense of competence and skills, and might eventually result in loss of self-esteem and identity. In examining accountability demands, Perryman (2007:182) found that teachers experience a panoply of negative emotions such as “fear”, “stress”, “huge panic”, “loss of control” and “resentment”.

According to Hargreaves (1998:89), when curriculum changes are introduced, teachers commonly experience feelings of uncertainty, inadequacy and may even feel that their professional identity is at stake. Some teachers experience “stress, burnout, loss of enjoyment and motivation and withdrawal from the job as a whole” (Hargreaves 1998:69). Such personal interpretations of change are highly significant since they connect to the issue of teachers’ emotions, which is an integral part of teaching (Slegers *et al.* 2002:90). Hargreaves (1998:93) asserts that teaching involves significant emotional labour because the tasks of teaching are emotional and motivational, not simply technical. Wolf (2002:118) argues that enforcing curriculum change destroys the trust that should underpin any professional relationship. According to Noble and Macfarlane (2005:55) and Fenech *et al.* (2008:1), ECE teachers’ capacity is significantly affected by a marked increase in burnout.

This is attributed to the highly romanticised images of childhood in ECE teacher preparation programmes that do not withstand the complexity, uncertainty and insecurity of working with young children and their families in the current social context.

McLaughlin (1987) proposes that external factors (professional development, resources and support) and internal factors (beliefs, motivation and job satisfaction) influence how teachers respond to curriculum change. But the relative importance of the internal vis-a-vis the external factors is determined largely by teachers' contexts. In developed countries, teachers generally have greater access to external factors. However, these are often overshadowed by the internal factors, especially when these are negative. In developing countries, much of the emphasis of policy and research is placed on external factors, to the exclusion of internal factors.

In South Africa, in terms of external factors, we seem to be following the pattern of developing countries, with great emphasis on the establishment or provision of infrastructure and support structures. However, as far as internal factors are concerned, the lack of research makes it impossible to say with certainty whether this also follows the pattern of developing countries. Against this background, I will seek to investigate how Grade R teachers respond to curriculum change.