

Chapter 4: Methodology and Research Design: Revealing ECE Teachers' Responses to Curriculum Change

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I describe the research methods and approach, data collection and analysis procedures, strategies for validity and the ethical and political considerations that guided this multi-case study. The main aim of this study, and of this chapter, is to investigate how Early Childhood Education (ECE) teachers respond to curriculum change.

4.2 Research Approach

I employed qualitative research methods in order to understand the social context in which ECE teachers' practice (Smith & Shepard 1988:310), framed within an interpretive paradigm. I chose the interpretive paradigm because it is characterised by concern for the individual. I therefore endeavoured to understand the subjective world of human experiences and actions, as recommended by Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000:22). I resisted the imposition of external factors, such as my own personal views, as this would only reflect my viewpoint as the observer, as opposed to that of the participants who were directly involved. Since I was particularly interested in the participants' beliefs, I observed their actions as a way of ascertaining their intentions and thereby shared their experiences. Cohen *et al.* (2000:22-23) regards this as "behaviour-with-meaning".

4.3 Research Design

I employed a case study design to illuminate¹⁸ the phenomenon of how Grade R teachers make operational decisions (Schlager 1999:257) as they respond to the implementation of the official curriculum (Hancock & Algozzine 2006:15). According to Cohen *et al.* (2007:253), a case study (i) is a specific instance that is designed to illustrate a more general principle; (ii) is the study of an instance in action; (iii) provides a unique example of real people in real situations, enabling readers to understand ideas more clearly than by simply presenting them with abstract theories or principles; (iv) can enable readers to understand how ideas and abstract principles fit together; and (v) can penetrate situations in ways that are not always susceptible to numerical analysis. This was appropriate since

¹⁸ Schlager (1999) uses the term "illuminate" to describe, explain and explore phenomenon.

my aim was to discern and pursue an understanding of the issues that are intrinsic to the case itself (Schwandt 2007:28). The case study design therefore enabled me to answer how and why questions, for example: How do teachers respond to the introduction of the official curriculum at reception year level?

My case study focused on nine Grade R teacher cases in their own environments, and was bounded by time and activity (Creswell 2003:15). This study was conducted during 2009, which was six years after the NCS had first been introduced. As discussed in Section 4.9, I use preferred pseudonyms when discussing my participants in order to protect their privacy.

Cohen *et al.* (2007:253) note that case studies are conducted in specific temporal, geographical, organisational or institutional contexts. In relation to this study, all the participants, i.e. the nine Grade R teachers of the four schools in which they teach, are located at state primary schools. I have outlined the participants' characteristics, roles and functions in the literature review and this will be elaborated on in Section 4.7. Although I had initially planned to draw my sample from each of the three main types of ECE programmes, namely community-based, home-based and school-based, I altered this strategy because the majority of Grade R teachers are being relocated to state primary schools. Three of the participants in this study, Paige, Patricia and Takalani, were previously employed at community-based ECE centres, but relocated to state primary schools because of higher remuneration and improved conditions of service, such as increased vacation leave, shorter working hours and ongoing access to professional development programmes sponsored by the Department of Education. Two other participants in this study, Anna and Jane, had previously owned their own ECE centres, but due to many learners moving to state primary schools, the centres experienced financial problems. Anna and Jane then became employed at state primary schools. Reinnette and Natasha, who also participated in this study, had previously been employed as foundation phase teachers, teaching Grade 1 and 2 respectively. They became Grade R teachers as posts became available at the state primary schools. Jackie has been teaching at preschools and Isabel is a recent graduate.

In Chapter 5, I present a detailed description and analysis of each teacher case in order to provide an in-depth understanding (Creswell 2007:75) of the factors that influence teachers' responses to curriculum change and portray the richness of each case (Cohen *et al.* 2007:253). In addition, I present a comprehensive description of the context of each

teacher's perspective and of the events relevant to the case. For example, whether the Grade R teacher plans collaboratively with her Foundation Phase colleagues. The descriptions and the analysis of the events are combined and are followed by a thematic analysis of all cases (cross-case analysis).

In the final interpretive phase, I report on the meaning and significance of each case. This constitutes the lessons learnt from the case studies. Yin's (2003:4) observation that case studies are useful when the phenomenon that is being studied is not readily distinguishable from its context is relevant to the ECE sector.

I initially intended to focus on participants with a minimum of ten years teaching experience, meaning that they would have had a minimum of five years experience implementing the broad principles of developmentally appropriate practices (DAP). With 2009 being the sixth year since the implementation of the National Curriculum Statement (NCS) in Grade R classes, these teachers would have started their careers before the introduction of the mandated curriculum, and therefore would have had the experience of either implementing or not implementing the new curriculum.

I initially anticipated that although the participants in this study would have undergone some training on the NCS, they would not have bachelor's degrees in the subject, meaning that they would be underqualified to implement the new curriculum. This was the case for five of the participants. One participant, a recent graduate, has a bachelor's degree in education, specialising in Early Childhood Development and Foundation Phase, and four remaining participants hold Higher Education Diplomas in Pre- and Junior Primary teaching. These five fully qualified teachers are all employed at the same state primary school by the school's governing body and not the Gauteng Department of Education.

4.4 Research Questions

The following research questions guided this inquiry:

Main Research Question:

How do teachers respond to the introduction of the official curriculum at reception year level (Grade R)?

Research Sub-questions

(i) How do Grade R teachers plan their lessons?

This reflects the process of lesson planning, for example whether the teacher planned her lessons on her own or together with her Foundation Phase colleagues. This illuminates whether or not teachers were receiving meaningful collegial support, and also enables me to examine the extent to which teachers were actually implementing their written planning in their classrooms.

(ii) Which classroom practices do Grade R teachers employ?

By focusing on teachers' classroom practices, I gained insight into their beliefs. This was particularly important because there is an integral relationship between beliefs and actions and therefore teachers' beliefs play a major role in their decision making about curriculum and instructional tasks (Keys & Bryan 2001:635). Teachers' beliefs and knowledge fields are not only the targets of change, they also affect change by serving as a knowledge filter through which teachers interpret new information including curriculum content and recommendations for change (Collopy 2003:288).

(iii) What informs Grade R teachers' responses to curriculum change?

This question focused my attention on both the external factors (professional development opportunities, teaching and learning resources and support) and the internal factors (attitudes, beliefs, emotions and job satisfaction) that influence the way in which individual Grade R teachers respond to curriculum change.

4.5 Research Context

As stated in Section 4.1.3, there are three main types of ECE programmes in South Africa, namely school-based, community-based and home-based programmes (Development Bank of Southern Africa 2007:14; National Department of Education 2001b:28). In 2000¹⁹, there were 3623 (17%) school-based ECE programmes, 10816 (49%) community-based programmes and 7453 (34%) home-based programmes, with a total of 21892 ECE centres identified in the Nationwide Audit of Early Childhood Development (ECD) provision (National Department of Education 2001b:28). I initially expected that this would provide a

¹⁹ Although outdated, these statistics are the most reliable that are available. The nationwide audit of ECD constitutes the most rigorous and comprehensive research on ECD to date.

wide representative picture of Grade R teachers, despite the fact that the majority of Grade R teachers are being relocated to state primary schools. Following a consultation with my supervisors, I adapted my sampling accordingly and selected teachers from a range of state primary schools only to achieve more relevant results. As noted previously in Chapter 1, Grade R is now part of the Foundation Phase of schooling and the teachers are employed by school governing bodies, not the Department of Education. Table 4.1 in Section 4.6, below, contains a summary of the participants in this research as well as an indication of their diverse contexts and backgrounds.

4.6 Participants

According to Schlager (1999:237), the setting that the analyst wants to examine and questions he or she wishes to address, will determine the unit of analysis. Grade R teachers constitute my main unit of analysis since most policy-makers and school change experts consider them to be the centrepiece of educational change (Datnow & Castellano 2000:777).

I took great care in choosing nine teachers from a range of state school settings in and around Johannesburg and Pretoria. This included a no-fee school, one low-fee school and two moderate-fee schools. None of the schools charge fees in excess of R800 per month. The average school charged R450 per month. While case studies are not generalisable in nature, one still needs to select one's subjects from a broadly representative perspective. I decided to include school principals in the study as secondary participants because of their role as leaders, which suggests that they have a powerful influence on the level of support Grade R teachers receive when implementing curriculum change. The main difference between South African principals and their international counterparts is that they are not formally required to provide instructional leadership to Grade R teachers. Although the Grade R classes have been in existence for varying periods of time, eight of the nine teachers have ten years ECE (birth to nine) teaching experience or more.

School A introduced its first Grade R class in 2001. A second class was added in 2006. These classes are located at a state primary school but are regarded as 'private' since they do not receive any subsidy from the Gauteng Department of Education. By the end of my fieldwork, the principal of School A had been informed that the Gauteng Department of Education would be taking over the running of the Grade R classes. The provincial education department's involvement would be linked to the programme's compliance with



School and Location	Context	Number of Grade R classes	Number of years the Grade R class has been in existence	Monthly school fees	Teacher/Learner Ratio	Language of Instruction	Teacher and Number of years of teaching experience
A Johannesburg	Historically white working class school, now 99% of the learners are black	2	6	R450 Learners can not attend if their parents are unable to pay.	1:32	English	Paige: 10 Patricia: 10
B Atteridgeville	African township	1	4	No-fee school but Grade R learners pay R50 per month	1:46	Sepedi	Anna: 14
C Centurion	Historically lower middle class, the majority of learners now come from townships and inner city areas	1	6 months	R600 Less than 50% of the learners' fees are up-to-date	1:25	English	Jane: 24
D Pretoria East	Historically affluent, white	5	16	R800 A small number of parents have been retrenched and are unable to pay fees; children are still allowed to attend school.	1:20	Afrikaans	Takalani: 20 Natasha: 19 Jackie: 21 Reinnette: 1 Isabel: 1

Table 4.1: Summary of Participants

the official curriculum and would provide teachers with access to increased professional development opportunities.

School B has had one Grade R class since 2005. It is a no-fee school but Grade R learners' parents are required to pay R50 per month for teaching and learning support materials.

School C began its Grade R class in 2009 and plans to add three more Grade R classes in 2011. The school governing body has appointed one teacher and one assistant teacher for the existing class of 24 learners.

The preschool section of School D has been in existence for 16 years and has five Grade R classes. The five Grade R classes form part of the pre-school section of this state primary school. There are also two three to four year-old classes and three four to five year-old classes at the school. The head of the preschool section said that she hopes to cater for babies and toddlers aged from 3 months to 3 years in the near future. The school's governing body employs a total of 14 pre-school staff members. It is important to note that the school fees are moderate and do not exceed R800 per month.

4.7 Sample Selection

Berg (2001:32) notes that purposive sampling focuses on certain types of individuals displaying certain attributes. According to Cohen *et al.* (2000:103) purposive sampling involves "hand picking the cases to be included in the sample based on their judgement and typicality". I selected the sample for this study after critically analysing the parameters of the South African population. (De Vos, Strydom, Fouché & Delpont 2005:345). In this way, I built up a sample that is satisfactory and relevant to the specific needs of this study. Other teachers might use the findings of my study to compare their teaching to that of my participants. Whilst this sample satisfied the needs of this specific study, I acknowledge that it does not represent the wider population since it is "deliberately and unashamedly selective and biased" (Cohen *et al.* 2000:104).

As noted in Section 1.9, the participants were all Grade R teachers at state primary schools. Indeed, this is a key aspect of the Grade R policy target. By 2014, the majority of Grade R classrooms will be located at state primary schools. In addition, Grade R has been incorporated into the Foundation Phase of schooling. It is therefore compulsory for Grade R teachers to implement the official curriculum. I anticipated that the participants

would have certain common characteristics such as (i) a minimum of ten years experience in the South African ECE field (ii) access to professional development programmes; (iii) exposure to the official curriculum; (iv) access to learning and teaching support materials; and (v) instructional from district officials, and/or Foundation Phase colleagues and/or the Head of Department. The extent to which the above factors influence individual participants' responses to curriculum change would necessarily vary and therefore formed the basis for my research questions.

When selecting cases to include in this study, I initially intended to focus specifically on teachers who had undergone training in the Basic Certificate in ECD and the National Certificate in ECD. These qualifications are unit-standard based and teachers and training providers are finding it difficult to complete them (SAIDE 2007:20) and have since been amended. The Basic Certificate in ECD has been phased out and is no longer offered. The National Certificate in ECD has been replaced by the Further Education and Training Certificate in ECD. By 2013, all teachers must have met the minimum requirements of attaining either the Relative Education Qualification Value (REQV) 14 or Grade 12 plus four years of teacher training. However, this does not apply to Grade R practitioners. Furthermore, the new teacher qualifications framework (2010) proposes a Higher Certificate in Grade R at NQF Level 5 which is equivalent to Grade 12 plus two years of teacher training. I later included participants who had qualifications equivalent to REQV 14 to examine how this influenced their responses to curriculum change. The rapidly changing teacher education environment may also inform teachers' responses to curriculum change.

4.8 Data Collection

While conducting this case study, I used multiple procedures or methods of data collection, including interviews, observations and document sourcing. This enabled me to present richly descriptive and detailed data on the nine Grade R teachers (two teachers at School A, one teacher at School B, one teacher at School C and 5 teachers at School D) who constitute my main unit of analysis. I conducted a semi-structured interview with each of the four school principals in order to ascertain what support is provided for teachers to aid them in effectively implementing the official curriculum. As noted by Datnow and Castellano (2000:776), the principal's role as instructional leader is vital. In Datnow and Castellano's study, the principals were responsible for ensuring staff motivation and

commitment, as well as providing and allocating adequate resources to various programmes.

I undertook a qualitative pilot study to test the research instruments and ensure that I am capable of conducting the research satisfactorily (Marshall & Rossman 1999:64). The data from the pilot phase is not included in this study's findings (Yin 2003:7) but was used to refine the research instruments. The pilot study was conducted at a state primary school three months prior to beginning of the data collection for this study. The participants were one Grade R teacher and one school principal. Their responses to the questions prompted me to rephrase some questions prior to commencing official data collection. I also became aware of the need to probe for more information in the interviews.

4.8.1 Data Collection Strategies

My data collection strategies included document sourcing, semi-structured interviews with participant teachers and participant principals as well as observations of teachers' classroom presentations. I choose these strategies to enable me to focus on participants' perspectives, opinions and experiences of the curriculum change.

4.8.1.1 Document Sourcing

I undertook document analysis of Grade R teachers' learning programmes and written lesson preparation, as well as their daily and weekly reflections and assessment records. This gave me insight into how the official curriculum has or has not influenced the instructional decisions of the nine teachers sampled in this study.

4.8.1.2 Semi-structured Interviews

I used semi-structured, one-on-one interviews to enable me to address my research questions and gain a detailed picture of the participants' beliefs about and perceptions of the official curriculum (Greef, in De Vos *et al.* 2005:296). My interview schedule began with an outline, listing the broad categories that were relevant to this study. Thereafter, I developed a set of questions that were relevant to each of the outlined categories. The schedule included essential questions, extra questions, throw-away questions and probing questions (Berg 2001:75).²⁰

²⁰ See Appendix 4.

My aim was to explain the teachers' understanding of the purpose of the official curriculum and its assessment expectations. Smith and Shepard (1988:310) note that interviews can be useful for this purpose since teachers' beliefs are best uncovered by inference from their case knowledge. Smith and Shepard (1988:310) explain this phenomenon as "that which people know without being able to state what they know". Furthermore, I view teachers' beliefs as being tied to specific events within their immediate personal experiences, which helps them to decide what to do in a given situation. Over and above the basic questions that were included in the interviews, I asked probing questions which enabled me to converse more freely with the participants and to delve into issues that arose during the interview process itself (Berg 2001:70). Furthermore, the interviews focused on the way in which the teachers design learning tasks and implement or respond to curriculum change. I followed this by asking the teachers about the support they receive to assist them in implementing the official curriculum and then asked questions related to how their beliefs and practices have changed over the course of the implementation.

4.8.1.3 Pre-testing the schedule

I initially conducted two interviews, transcribed their tape recordings and went through them with my supervisors to enable me to identify any gaps and missed opportunities in the interview process. As the interviews progressed, my questions were adapted to address the issues that were raised by the initial test participants. My interview technique progressed from direct to indirect questions. For example, after the first two interviews, I asked teachers exactly how they were implementing the official curriculum in their classrooms. Initially, I only asked teachers whether they were implementing the official curriculum or not and why or why not.

I used interviews as the principal means of gathering the information that had a direct bearing on my research objectives (Cohen *et al.* 2007:350). Throughout the process, I remained cognisant of the fact that interviews have an ethical dimension to them since they involve personal interaction, are subjective and produce information that is embedded in human life. Three main ethical issues can be identified when conducting interviews, namely informed consent, confidentiality and the consequences of the interviews. I therefore sought informed consent from all participants and their principals.

I utilised an interview schedule that Denzin (1989) termed the "nonscheduled standardised interview". These interviews consist of less-formal, open-ended protocols that allowed me to change the order and phrasing of the questions within each individual interview

according to the particular participant and situation (Ackerman 2004:293). I transcribed the conversations as soon as possible after they had taken place, and analysed the responses using a coding scheme that reflected my research questions and conceptual framework. In order to verify participants' opinions, and thus lend credibility to the study, I used member checking by providing each participant with a draft copy of the transcript and the opportunity to rectify any miscommunications through subsequent conversations. This proved to be rather unproductive as participants were inclined to paraphrase their comments and correct their grammar.

I was pleasantly surprised by how eager participants were to talk about "what we do every day", as noted by Jackie, and by the fact that I encountered no obstacles when entering the field. None of the participants had ever participated in research studies previously. My first step was to contact schools telephonically and ask to speak to the principal. I explained that I was conducting research on the implementation of the National Curriculum Statement in Grade R classes and requested an appointment to introduce myself and explain the parameters of my study. I gave each potential participant a letter requesting their participation and a letter of informed consent. I spent time before each interview explaining these letters to each participant. In all cases, I received a warm reception. One Grade R teacher noted, "I have been teaching pre-school for more than twenty years and I have never been interviewed by anyone." Another teacher said, "Our sector is so marginalised. It is exciting that you are doing research on what we do every day." Yet another said, "No-one has ever asked me what I do in my classroom." This suggests that ECE teachers in general, and Grade R teachers in particular, are under-researched.

4.8.1.4 Observations

Observation methods are powerful tools for gaining insight into particular situations. Observational data is useful as it affords the researcher the opportunity to gather 'live' data from 'live' or naturally occurring social situations (Cohen *et al.* 2000:315; Cohen *et al.* 2007:396). Observations enabled me to understand the context of Grade R programmes, to be open-ended and inductive, to see things that might otherwise be unconsciously missed, to discover things that participants might not talk freely about in interview situations, to move beyond perception-based data (e.g. opinions in interviews), and to access participants' personal knowledge.

I conducted non-participant observations of classroom interactions to enhance my understanding of the research topic. Since my main focus is Grade R teachers, I observed

them during naturally occurring activities that are commonly part of their daily programme. This enabled me to characterise the curriculum, teaching methods and organisation of classrooms as well as to describe the differences between the classrooms that were observed and to discover any contextual features of the schools that might be helpful when interpreting the data. Although I had originally planned to use video to record the classroom observations and class presentations, and to include the context or setting as well as the teaching and learning activities in my research (Creswell 2003:19, Silverman 2004:272), I was unable to obtain ethics clearance for video recordings. I therefore took extensive field notes during my observations that were guided by an observation schedule (see Appendix 6) that incorporated a checklist adapted from Cohen *et al.* (2000:312). This provided me with authentic data on how the teacher was responding to curriculum change.

I also carried a Dictaphone to record my own comments as soon as possible. I tried to remain cognisant throughout the process that “although observation frequently claims neutrality by being non-interventionist, there are several ethical considerations that surround it”, particularly because “observer effects can be powerful” (Cohen *et al.* 2000:314-315). Throughout the research process, I was also aware of the risk of bias, especially since I was the only observer and I made choices concerning what observations were valid and then made selective data entries accordingly. Another constraint of observation that has been noted by Cohen *et al.* (2997:411) is that participants may change their behaviour if they know that they are being observed. I therefore spent nine months on data collection, conducting three observations of one hour each per teacher. Repeated observation enabled me to gain a deeper understanding of how teachers respond to curriculum change. I compared what I observed during classroom activities to what the teachers said in the interviews and what was recorded in their teacher preparation files. This crystallisation of the data enhanced the validity of my analysis.

4.8.2 Challenges encountered during Data Collection

A number of challenges arose once I entered the field that I had not anticipated. The interviews occurred in each of the nine participants’ own classrooms in the afternoons once their learners had departed. However, time pressures persisted largely due to Grade R teachers’ involvement in extra-curricular activities or/and after-school care programmes. Although I initially considered conducting the interviews away from the school, for example in a coffee shop, this was not convenient for the participants. Many of them have young

children and therefore have domestic and child-rearing responsibilities. The participants were also not available during school holidays.

After I had already made numerous visits to her classroom, one participant relocated to another province. I therefore had to exclude her data from my study. Another participant agreed to the interview but we could not find a suitable time to meet and, although I had conducted classroom observations and an interview with her principal, I decided to exclude School E from my study altogether.

4.9 Data Analysis

Once I had concluded data collection, my main challenge was that the data was very extensive and needed to be reduced. I therefore organised and presented data analysis according to the individual research participants – the nine teacher cases. I considered the total responses of each individual before proceeding to the next individual or teacher case. As noted by Cohen *et al.* (2007:467), this enabled me to “preserve the coherence and integrity of the individual’s response” and to present a whole picture of the case. After carefully considering all nine teacher cases, I was able to reflect upon the issues that emerged across the individuals in order to examine themes, patterns of responses, similarities and differences and to compare individuals and the issues raised by each. In other words, I was able to summarise the data and present all nine participants’ responses on the conceptual framework matrix, as seen in Appendix 14.

During the data analysis phase of my study, I remained mindful that my data analysis should be rigorous, disciplined, systematic, carefully documented and methodical (Schwandt 2007:6). My analysis was recursive and began at the outset of data collection. I employed a variety of analytic strategies that involved sorting, organising and reducing the data so that it was manageable. I then reassembled the data in order to interpret it (Schwandt 2007:7). I specifically focused on how each teacher’s personal experiences created a backdrop for how he or she responded to the introduction of the official curriculum. I examined each participant’s daily classroom practice from their point of view. I used Weft Qualitative Data Analysis (WQDA), a computer program, as my method of analysing the interviews and field notes in order to achieve a holistic analysis of each case (Creswell 2003:20,75). My data analysis began by breaking down the whole corpus of data (field notes and transcriptions) by categorising and coding the individual segments and establishing a pattern for the whole by relating the codes to one another (Schwandt

2007:7). As illustrated in my conceptual framework, my provisional findings were organised according to themes and categories of teachers' responses, knowledge and skills as well as attitudes and emotions. Hereafter, I focused on the similarities and differences concerning each teacher's detailed narrative. The themes evolved from a saturation of all the collected data, reflecting the purpose of the research and responding to the questions under investigation (Hancock & Algozzine 2006:16). My analysis is thorough in the context of the teacher case and includes cross-case analysis and meaningful interpretations of each teacher case (Creswell 2007:75; Yin 2003:xvii).

I used thick descriptions of teachers' contexts and systematically analysed the data in terms of the way in which the introduction of curriculum change influenced the instructional decisions of teachers, and how the kind of support they were receiving influenced their classroom practices. As noted by Marshall and Rossman (1999:61), this allowed me to focus on the views expressed by participants on curriculum change. I used quotes from interviews with participants and anecdotes "composed from interactions and other literary techniques to create a mental image that brought to life the complexity of the many variables inherent" in how teachers respond to curriculum change (Hancock & Algozzine 2006:16). Furthermore, the strategies I used to interpret, report and confirm the case study's findings are articulated in Chapter 5. I systematically searched for data that either confirmed or refuted my findings in order to remain objective and to lend credibility to my study (Smith & Shepard 1988:312).

I conducted semi-structured interviews with each school's principal in order to understand their leadership role, specifically in the context of curriculum change. I sought to understand how principals support teachers in implementing the official curriculum, despite not formally being required to provide instructional leadership.

4.10 Addressing Credibility and Trustworthiness

According to Creswell (2007:205), "validation has been cast within an interpretive approach to qualitative research, marked by a focus on the researcher's role, a concern about the lack of truth in validation, a form of validation based on negotiation and dialogue with participants and interpretation that is temporal, located in a specific context and always open to reinterpretation". I used the process of validation to assess the accuracy of my findings (De Vos *et al.* 2005:345). To ensure credibility, I used thick descriptions to provide a feeling of the setting, as this is an important part of observation and taking field

notes. As noted by Schwandt (2007:296), thick descriptions are not simply a matter of amassing relevant detail. Instead, they are an interpretive characteristic of description. I described my participants' actions and began interpreting them by recording the circumstances, meanings, intentions, strategies and motivations that characterise a particular response. Denzin and Lincoln (2000:393) argue that the description of people, places and events is the cornerstone of qualitative research. Furthermore, as noted in the literature review in Chapter 2, the total learning environment is a very important part of a high quality ECE programme. Therefore, I attempted to capture as much information about the setting as possible.

Schwandt (2007:299) outlines four criteria for the trustworthiness of research studies, namely that the data should be credible, transferable, dependable, and confirmable. My study addressed the above criteria in the following ways: I sought to accurately reconstruct and represent participants' views of curriculum change, I provided readers with sufficient information on the ways in which the findings of each case might be transferred, I ensured that the process of data collection and analysis was logical, traceable and carefully documented and I linked my assertions, findings and interpretations of the data to the evidence in readily discernible ways.

As noted by Marshall and Rossman (1999:28,54), case studies rest on the worldviews of both the researcher and the participants. Since I am a proponent of a play-based, informal and developmentally appropriate approach to ECE programmes, I needed to remain cognisant that this should not bias my study in any way. The use of multiple data collection methods, such as interviews, observations and document sourcing, as crystallisation of data was used as a method of validation (Denzin & Lincoln 2000:5). I attempted to avoid subjective interpretation and the selective analysis of data (Cohen *et al.* 2000:116).

To ensure the quality of my study, I paid considerable attention to presenting sufficient information on the research process, sufficient evidence to support my findings and addressing evidence that could potentially refute my findings (Anfara, Brown & Mangione 2002:29; Seale in Seale, Gobo, Gubrium & Silverman 2004:416). My analysis of themes was not used for generalising beyond the case, but rather for understanding the complexity of each individual case (Creswell 2007:75). I also used prolonged engagement in the field, peer reviews and debriefings, member checking, thick descriptions, detailed field notes and high quality tape recordings and transcriptions (Schwandt 2007:299). As recommended by Anfara *et al.* (2002:30), I publicly disclosed the decisions I made during

the research process. For example, I consciously decided to select participants from a range of different state primary schools: they had been implementing Grade R for varying periods.

To ensure the reliability and validity of my research findings, I used the method of crystallisation. In this study crystallisation is reconceptualised as trustworthiness, rigor and quality within a qualitative paradigm. I attempted to eliminate bias and increase the trustworthiness of the data by using multiple ways of establishing truth, or in the words of Niewenhuis, through a “constant search for convergence among multiple and different sources of information to form themes” (Niewenhuis 2007:81). I drew on the insights of Cohen and Manion (2007) regarding ways of reducing bias by being conscious of my personal attitudes, opinions and expectations, and tried not to seek answers simply to support my preconceived notions.

4.11 Political and Ethical Considerations

The reception year (Grade R) is the target of policy in the ECE sector in South Africa (National Department of Education 2001a) are reflected by White Paper No. 5 on Early Childhood Development. With the introduction of the official national curriculum (NCS), the reception year became part of the Foundation Phase of schooling. Although the majority of Grade R posts are still located at community-based ECE centres, many are gradually being relocated to state primary schools. School governing bodies, not the Department of Education, employ Grade R teachers. As a result, there are many issues regarding equity. Although state primary schools have relatively better resources and funding compared to community-based schools, teachers at state primary schools are still paid low salaries compared to Foundation Phase teachers (Clasquin-Johnson, 2007).

I applied for and received ethics clearance prior to commencing the data collection phase of this study. Throughout this phase, I was mindful of the assertion made by Cohen *et al.* (2000:49) that ethical issues could arise from the problems that are usually investigated by social scientists and the methods that are used to obtain valid and reliable data. The implications of this meant that each stage in the research sequence was a potential source of ethical problems or dilemmas.

Procedures prior to data collection included sending a letter to each of the school principals involved requesting their participation in the research and arranging meetings with the principal and the head of the Foundation Phase department in order to gain their

permission for participation in the study. I was also cognisant of the fact that the research should cause minimal disruptions to the physical setting. As noted in Section 4.6, interviews were conducted after school hours in order to minimise the interference with the normal activities of the participants (Creswell 2003:65).

Cohen *et al.* (2000:50) contend that informed consent constitutes the foundation of ethical procedures. I obtained participants' informed consent by (a) explaining the purpose of the study, so that participants understood the nature of the research and its likely impact on them, (b) explaining that participation is voluntary, and (c) assuring them that they may withdraw from the study at any time. See letter of informed consent in Appendix 3. Furthermore, I explained the procedures of the study, so that participants could reasonably anticipate what to expect in the study. I emphasised that all the participants had the right to ask questions, obtain a copy of the report and have their privacy respected. I requested participants to sign letters of consent at our initial meeting, prior to commencing data collection. I will avoid potential risk to the participants by ensuring that my study is free from any form of deceit, duress or unfair inducement or manipulation (Berg 2001:56).

The principle of informed consent arises from the participants' right to freedom and self-determination (Cohen *et al.* 2000:51; Cohen *et al.* 2007:52). Informed consent was sought in order to protect and respect these rights. However, informed consent also places some responsibility on the participants should anything go wrong while conducting the research.

Cohen *et al.* (2000:61) contend that privacy can be approached from three perspectives: (i) the sensitivity of the information being given, (ii) the setting that is being observed, and (iii) the dissemination of information. I assured the participants that I would protect their right to privacy and therefore guaranteed participants that the information they provided would in no way reveal their identities. Although a participant agreeing to a face-to-face interview can in no way expect complete anonymity, non-traceability is an important matter, and this extends to aggregating data in some cases, so that an individual's response is not identifiable.

Throughout the research process, I reminded myself that I needed to demonstrate the appropriate sensitivity and awareness of the context in which ECE programmes operate. In the interpretation and presentation of the data, I used preferred pseudonyms for individuals and places to identify their voices (views, perspectives) in the final report, while protecting their identities. I have been extremely cautious when referring to participants

and their respective settings (Berg 2001:58). This ensured anonymity by not using the names of the participants or any other personal means of identification. I also promised that I would protect participants' rights to privacy through confidentiality. This means that although I know who has provided the information and I am able to identify the participants from the information given, I do not make the connections known publicly (Cohen *et al.* 2000:62).

The data generated in this research will be stored in a password-protected file at the University of Pretoria for a period of 15 years. I will forward a copy of this thesis to the Gauteng Department of Education who granted me permission to conduct this study. I protected the participants from harm by ensuring their privacy and confidentiality (Denzin & Lincoln 2000:139). The names of participants and schools are not mentioned. Instead, preferred pseudonyms were used. I took special care to ensure that my thick descriptions of the settings did not compromise the privacy and confidentiality of the participants in any way.

4.12 Summary

In this chapter, I described the research design, methods and approach that guided this case study. I further described the data collection and analysis procedures I employed, as well as the strategies used to ensure validity. The ethical and political considerations throughout the study were also discussed.