

Chapter 5: Findings: Presentation and Discussion

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I present and discuss my findings of how the nine participating Grade R teachers, namely Paige, Patricia, Anna, Jane, Takalani, Natasha, Reinnette, Isabel and Jackie²¹, who are based in and around Pretoria and Johannesburg, responded to curriculum change. The discussion presented in the sub-sections of this chapter directly address the findings for each of my research questions.

The main research question that guided my investigation was, “How do teachers respond to the introduction of the official curriculum at reception year level?” I specifically discuss what official national curriculum requirements the teachers *ignore, resist, adopt* and/or *adapt*. In addition to this main research question, my research sub-questions were as follows:

i. How do Grade R teachers plan their lessons?

I present and discuss examples of the participant teachers’ lesson plans for the lessons that I observed. I specifically review the structure and content of their lesson plans in relation to the design features, such as learning outcomes and assessment standards, of the National Curriculum Statement (NCS) for Grade R. I examine the extent to which the teachers followed departmental guidelines, which includes (a) how each participant teacher structured and presented her written lesson plan; (b) the extent to which she integrated the eight learning areas into the three Foundation Phase learning programmes; (c) whether she planned for assessment; (d) whether she reflected on her lessons; and (e) whether she planned in isolation or in collaboration with her Grade R or Foundation Phase colleagues.

ii. Which classroom practices do Grade R teachers employ?

I describe and discuss each participant teacher’s classroom practices that I observed during the presentation of her lessons. This will be centred on her Grade R pedagogy and her philosophy of teaching and learning.

²¹ All the participating Grade R teachers are female and the female singular personal pronoun will be used throughout.

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

I discuss how both external factors such as professional development, resources and support, and internal factors such as personal beliefs, motivation and job satisfaction, as identified in Chapter 2, influenced each participant teacher's response to curriculum change. In addition, I explore the influence of her knowledge and skills, as well as her emotions and attitude towards curriculum change.

5.2 Analytical Strategy

I will report the findings according to my research questions and conceptual framework. The research themes and sub-themes that emerged from the research questions above were as follows:

The first group of themes was related to teachers' lesson planning and the sub-themes included their approach to lesson planning, the content, level of comprehensiveness, whether it reflected the design features of the official curriculum, assessment requirements, integration of learning areas into Foundation Phase learning programmes, whether they planned for differentiation, how they addressed language development and transition to Grade 1.

The second group of themes relates to Grade R teachers' classroom practice and the sub-themes includes their Grade R pedagogy and philosophy of learning and teaching, their perspective of how teaching has changed. They were in accord that "Grade R is specialised".

The third group of themes relates to sub-question 3 which considered the factors informing teachers' responses to curriculum change, namely (i) the external factors: professional development, resources and support, as well as (ii) the internal factors: beliefs, motivation and job satisfaction. I scoped each participant's responses on the matrix of the conceptual framework (see Appendix 14) which provided an overview of their responses and revealed each participant's primary curriculum focus.

As previously mentioned in Chapter 4, the data was obtained through semi-structured interviews, classroom observations and document analysis of each participant's written lesson plans and classroom practices. I asked questions specifically related to the internal and external factors that inform how teachers respond to curriculum change. In addition, I conducted a semi-structured interview and numerous informal conversations with the

principal at each of my four research sites. The purpose of these interactions with the principals was to deepen my understanding of the participants' context and to pay special attention to the external factors that informed their responses to curriculum change. It also afforded an opportunity to confirm or refute data gathered from the individual participants.

In chapter 6 I will take a broader view and discuss the emerging themes that could be seen emanating from the data. These do not necessarily fit in neatly with the conceptual framework and to some extent constitute unexpected findings.



Table 5.1: Analytical Strategy—Research Themes and Sub-themes

	Themes (integrated with Sub-questions)	Sub-themes	Interpretation	
Early childhood teachers' responses to curriculum change	Lesson planning How do Grade R teachers plan their lessons? How teachers plan as a result of the demands of curriculum change	Approach Content Level of comprehensiveness Design features Assessment Integration Differentiation Language Transition to Grade 1	1: Teacher Plans What? How? What does this reveal about her response to curriculum change?	
	Instructional practice—lens to examine how teacher's respond to curriculum change Which classroom practices do Grade R teachers employ?	Grade R Pedagogy & Philosophy How teaching has changed Grade R classroom practice “Grade R is specialised.”	2. Teacher presents lesson/s Teachers' instructional practices illuminate their responses to curriculum change All four responses on matrix revealed	Response: Integrated Mainly ignore Mainly resist
Main Question: How do teachers respond to curriculum change at reception year level?	What participant principals think of the Grade R curriculum and what they say about the implementation of Grade R in their schools. What is the role of the principal in the implementation of curriculum change?	Participant principal's beliefs & understanding of Grade R	3: Relate to the school environment Broader context—origin of external and internal factors	Mainly adopt Mainly adapt
	Factors affecting response Capacity to implement curriculum change What informs Grade R teachers' responses to curriculum change?	External factors: Professional development resources support Internal factors: Beliefs motivation job satisfaction	4. Beyond the school DoE, Training providers, Unions, Professional bodies 5. Focus returns to the teacher Efficacy Emotions of change	
Conclusion	Primary curriculum focus	The child The curriculum The teacher		Interpret findings

5.3 Grade R Teachers' Responses to Curriculum Change

The conceptual framework that I used for this study is described in Table 5.2. The conceptual framework relies on the theoretical concepts of knowledge or skills and the attitudes or emotions associated with change. For example, teachers with high levels of knowledge or skills and a positive attitude to change are more likely to *adapt* the curriculum change (Ballet & Kelchtermans 2008:54; Richardson & Placier 2002:909). Therefore, I discuss my findings in relation to this conceptual framework.

Table 5.2: Conceptual Framework

		Attitude towards change		
		Negative	Positive	
Knowledge & Skill	high	resist	adapt	high
	low	ignore	adopt	low

I present my research findings according to my analytical strategy, research questions and research themes and sub-themes, as outlined in Table 5.1. I examined my coded data in great detail in order to identify any emerging patterns, themes and sub-themes. Although none of the participants' responses was straightforward, each participant did have a dominant response (i.e. all the teachers typically *adopted* some requirements and *adapted* other requirements of the curriculum change). The coded data and dominant themes provided the basis of my classificatory mechanism. In addition, I discuss the similarities and differences between the nine Grade R teachers' responses to curriculum change. Table 5.3 introduces the research participants.

5.4 Introducing the Research Participants

The table below provides an overview of the nine teacher participants (Grade R teachers). It lists their preferred pseudonym, the number of years of teaching experience, the number of years of Grade R teaching experience as well as the number of years that they have been implementing the NCS.

Table 5.3 Research Participants—Grade R Teachers

Participant (preferred pseudonym)	Site	Years of teaching experience	Years in Grade R / teaching 5-6 year-olds	Years participant has been implementing the NCS	Previous employment, location and context	Qualifications
Paige	A	10 years	10 years	5 years	Community-based ECE centre	NQF Level 5 ECD Diploma
Patricia	A	10 years	10 years	3 years	Community-based ECE centre	NQF Level 5 ECD Diploma
Anna	B	15 years	4 years	4 years	Manager of community-based ECE centre	Studying towards NQF Level 5
Jane	C	24 years	24 years	3 years	Preschool owner	No formal qualifications. Entered Level 5 programme through RPL. Now studying towards NQF Level 5
Takalani	D	20 years	15 years	5 years	Preschool	HDE (Higher Diploma in Pre-primary and Junior Primary Education)
Natasha	D	19 years	6 months	5 years	Grade 1	HDE
Reinnette	D	15 years	1 year, 6 months	5 years	Grade 2	HDE
Isabel	D	1 year, 6 months	1 year, 6 months	1 year, 6 months	Full-time student	B.Ed Degree in ECD and Foundation Phase
Jackie	D	14 years	2 years	5 years	Grade 2	HDE

The nine teacher participants were teaching Grade R classes at four different state primary schools. Paige, Patricia and Jane have between 10 and 24 years of experience teaching 5-6 year olds and have been implementing the NCS since relocating from community ECE centres to state primary schools. Participants Natasha, Reinnette, Jackie and Isabel have relatively limited experience teaching Grade R, despite three of them having many years of experience as Foundation Phase teachers, as well as several years of experience

implementing the NCS. In addition, these participants (Natasha, Reinnette, Jackie and Isabel) hold qualifications across the ECD phase (birth to nine years).²²

5.5 Lesson Planning

As noted in Table 5.1, the analytical strategy that guided my data analysis assumes that teachers' lesson plans reveal the first level of their response to curriculum change. In this section, I describe and discuss each Grade R teacher's approach to lesson planning, content and sequence of activities, as well as her planning for progression, integration, assessment, differentiation and transition to Grade 1.²³ I discussed each teacher's lesson plan with her after observing her lesson presentation. This enabled me to assess the extent to which she followed her plan and to pose questions about what I had observed.

Sub-question i. How do Grade R teachers plan their lessons?

5.5.1 Process

As noted in section 2.5.6, Grade R teachers are required to follow 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.

All nine participants noted that they had *adopted* the guidelines for learning programmes mentioned above as well as the Gauteng Department of Education's Circular 28/2005 (see Appendix 1) when planning their lessons. All participants also noted that the planning requirements of the NCS were radically different from how they had previously planned their lessons. Natasha (Site D) summed this up as follows:

Natasha: The planning is different because the challenges are different, there is much more creativity, group work has been added and needs to be planned. It's not suddenly more work. You know, the first thing you look at is the theme. Then you look at what you want to achieve during the next week, which learning

²² The Higher Diploma in Pre-primary and Junior Primary is no longer offered by teacher education institutions and is currently equivalent to a four-year Bachelor in Education degree with specialisation in ECD and Foundation Phase.

²³ This will reveal the extent to which she is following the departmental guidelines to lesson planning

outcomes you want to address because you are on your way to your assessment. So then, you begin to plan your lessons.

The participant teachers all agreed that the NCS compelled them to be more organised and systematic in how they planned their lessons. Takalani (Site D), Reinnette (Site D) and Anna (Site B) described the process of lesson planning as follows:

Takalani: I think one is much more organised... You begin with the learning outcomes and assessment standards, then your lesson planning and your assessment task ... Initially it is more difficult, but once you master it, your teaching task is easier. I think the major change is that I now first consider what the child should be able to do. I first look at the assessment standards, which tell me what skills and abilities the child must master and then I plan my lessons accordingly. In the past, I looked at my lesson and then I asked myself, 'what do I want to achieve from this lesson? Now it is exactly the opposite.

Reinnette: We plan very carefully. First, we look at the learning outcomes and assessment standards and see what we want to use, and select the important things that we will assess. We plan our themes accordingly. The assessment standards give us guidelines and we find appropriate learning and teaching resources. Everything we do must link to an assessment standard. We do not just do something without a purpose. We must be able to assess learning.

Anna: When I plan my lessons, I use the worksheet (planning form), the teacher's guide and the policy document. I start doing the work schedule first for the whole term. Out of that work schedule, I make a lesson plan.

All the participant teachers stated that they were implementing the three Foundation Phase learning programmes and that their planning documentation reflects the design features, specifically learning outcomes and assessment standards, set out by the NCS. The teachers were unanimous in the view that it was initially a challenge to understand the complex planning requirements of the NCS because the process was so different to what they were used to. Moreover, they noted that planning their lessons according to the NCS had significantly increased their workload because lesson plans now have to contain more detail than they did before.

The National Department of Education's 98-page guideline document instructs teachers "to find ways to make the planning process manageable" (p.5). Regardless, participants, including those who had been implementing the NCS for several years, described the

challenges they encountered in preparing their lesson plans as “time consuming”, “demanding”, “tedious”, “very difficult” and “exhausting”. This is revealed below by excerpts from their responses:

Takalani: I think that for a young (novice) teacher just beginning her teaching career, the administrative tasks related to writing out the lesson plan is very difficult. Whereas in the past, we developed weekly lesson plans and we completed written planning for every lesson. Now it is work schedules and annual planning, it is all very time consuming, together with all the different lessons for numeracy, literacy and life skills. In addition, they must understand it all before they can plan effectively. We never had that in our training, so it is like using a foreign language; it makes it difficult for people to buy into the new ideas.

Jane: There's so much filing that they want. You have one file with all your work in it and then they want you to have another assessment file. Then they want you to have a portfolio file with all the work that you have done with the learners, then you have another assessment file for the learner.

The participant teachers pointed out that, with the exception of assessment reports on their learners, their lesson planning was the main mechanism of accountability because their work was largely assessed by their planning documentation and other “administrative tasks”²⁴ such as detailed assessment recording sheets (See Appendix 12). This method of accountability was introduced based on the assumption that others—instructional leaders, colleagues, departmental officials—could gain insight into what teachers were doing in their classrooms from their planning documentation. Only Site D’s principal regularly reviewed teachers’ written lesson plans, which they were required to submit to him on a weekly basis. He argued that their planning documentation enabled him to know exactly what they were doing in their classrooms because he assumed that they were not deviating from their plans when they were in fact doing so.

Site D principal: I'm quite sure that they are implementing the NCS because I look at their files, so I see the end product. I see how they compile a lesson... I

²⁴ The administrative tasks referred to here have been addressed in the Department of Education’s most recent review of the curriculum (Government Gazette No. 1227 dated 29 December 2009). Subsequently, the Gauteng Department of Education issued Circular 2/2010 to strengthen curriculum implementation. In particular, administrative tasks have been significantly reduced in order to “allow more time for the core business of teaching and learning in order to improve the quality of education and improve learner outcomes” (Gauteng Department of Education, 2010:2). However, this occurred after my fieldwork.

will see the whole process and they write it down so that I can see exactly how it happens.

The participant teachers stated that it was unlikely that anyone would see the presentation of their lesson plans. As noted by Natasha, “the departmental officials do not have the time to visit every teacher and mainly look at the files”. Only Natasha and Anna had ever received class visits from departmental officials. Moreover, the teachers themselves revealed that in practice, they deviated from their planning for a range of reasons, as discussed below in section 5.5.3. Jane’s (Site C) statement, “My classroom is my private space”, reveals her beliefs and attitude towards what she perceives to be interference in her work. This contrasts radically with the international literature on teacher accountability, discussed in Section 2.4.5, particularly in terms of the importance of collegial and instructional support for Grade R teachers to implement the official curriculum. Rowan and Miller (2007:252) have noted that this is “why change frequently flounders at the classroom door”—teachers deviate significantly from their planning. The participant teachers followed different approaches in responding to the challenge of lesson documentation, as discussed further in section 5.5.3 below.

5.5.2 Purpose

In separate interviews, Natasha, Takalani, Isabel, Reinnette and Jackie (Site D), expressed the opinion that thorough planning ensured that their teaching had more purpose and a clearer direction because they knew what the policy expected from them, namely the minimum knowledge and skills that their learners had to acquire by the end of Grade R. The statements below explain the teachers’ views of the new planning guidelines.

Jackie: The planning is more thorough than before. The planning must be much better as well. Otherwise, your class will be in chaos if you are unable to guide the lesson.

Natasha: The NCS can enrich your approach to teaching. For example using group work and understanding that children are progressing at their individual pace. I think it is good. It offers you more opportunities in your teaching. You must be ready. You must be organised. You must plan your lessons thoroughly. I think for us, in Grade R it is easier because we work in groups on a daily basis. It allows us to be much more creative. We are not confined to books and pen-and-paper tasks. Everything is very concrete.

However, Jane (Site C), Anna (Site B), Patricia and Paige (Site A) were slower to praise the guidelines. They argued that although the NCS had given their teaching more purpose and direction, they did not understand the need for the new planning requirements. In addition, they noted that they were not against planning *per se*, just the new “complex” and “more demanding” requirements for lesson planning.

Paige: Well, I definitely think the main change is that the NCS gives everyone a set level of what is expected of them—the learners, as well as the educators. Now there is a set standard of what they should be doing. I think that that is useful ... I think telling teachers ‘this (identifying learning outcomes) is what you need to be doing first before doing your activities’ gives teaching a purpose. ‘Why am I teaching this specific skill?’

According to Jane, although she has *adopted* the new planning requirements, she still believes that it is “so demanding that I think teachers are exhausted by the time they get to the actual teaching”. In Jane’s opinion, there is a greater focus on written lesson planning than on actual teaching. In addition, Jane said that the planning requirements encroached on her leisure time.

Jane: Well, I usually do my planning in my holidays and weekends and I sit up very late at night. I have to tell you, my whole July holiday went because I just sat and I planned.

5.5.3 Approach

The Grade R teachers at Sites A and B *adopted* the whole phase curriculum planning requirements, although this was not done immediately at Site A. Paige and Patricia revealed that they had previously *ignored* this requirement because they viewed the NCS as too formal for Grade R, but due to the Gauteng Department of Education (GDE) district officials’ insistence on the new planning requirements, they *reluctantly complied*. The five Grade R teachers at Site D *adapted* this requirement by taking turns to do the planning for the whole group. However, although the five Grade R teachers planned as a group, they did not include their Foundation Phase colleagues in the planning. Jane (Site C) explained that she *resisted* including her Foundation Phase colleagues in her planning because she believed that they did not understand Grade R. She dismissed their feedback because she did not consider it to be constructive. Therefore, Jane planned her lessons completely in isolation.

Jane: They (referring to her Foundation Phase colleagues) looked at my work and they said when they checked my file, nothing was right.

The file Jane referred to above contained her lesson planning. In addition, she noted:

Jane: In order to follow the NCS more closely, I would say the school, the HoDs need firstly to be educated about how to work with Grade R, they first need to know it ... but they must have a clear understanding that Grade R is a different concept to the Foundation Phase.

In contrast to Jane (Site C), Anna (Site B) noted that she enjoyed a good working relationship with her head of department (HoD) and Grade 1 colleague, who assisted her with her planning.

Anna: I am doing my own programme with the help of my HoD. She helps me with my planning, how to use the assessment standards. The Grade 1 teacher is next door to my class. Initially I asked her for help and she showed me how to use the assessment standards.

Anna (Site B) further stated that it took her a long time to make sense of the new lesson planning requirements, largely because she only received training in the NCS after she had begun implementing it.

Anna: The head of department first introduced me to the ASs (assessment standards) and LOs (learning outcomes). I found it difficult, because she was giving me a lot of work, including a lot of homework. She showed me and then she would say, "go and do it alone at home". I would go home and I would struggle and struggle. I would get a headache. The next day I'd come back and I'd show her what I'd done and then she'd rectify my work and then we would sit down again and she'd show me again and then I would sit down again (on my own) and it's then that I started understanding. Later the school organised the workshops on the NCS.

Anna further noted that when the National Department of Education introduced the Foundations for Learning Campaign (FFL) in 2008, her workload increased even further due to the additional requirements for lesson planning.²⁵ Anna explained that the FFL

²⁵ This study is based on the NCS and not the FFL. I only mention the FFL here to illustrate that Anna experienced this as a further intensification of her already demanding and time-consuming lesson planning requirements.

required teachers to combine the “national curriculum with the milestones. I don’t understand it.” However, following her attendance of a GDE workshop that provided examples of lesson plans, Anna could explain what the GDE requirements were. Anna and her colleagues followed these examples and other scripted materials slavishly.

Anna: I am teaching according to the ACE book. The ACE book has the work set out according to themes for the whole year. Therefore, I choose the theme, and then I use it for two weeks or three weeks. When I finish it, I move on to the next one.

Jane’s (Site C) experience was similar to Anna’s. She noted that she struggled to understand the planning requirements of the NCS and that training had followed implementation.

Jane: I was actually put in the deep end. I did not have a clue what they were talking about. Then I taught myself from the NCS documents, I kept reading it and reading it... I finally got some idea what was happening. Then the Department decided to offer us a training workshop where they taught us how to do the learning programmes and work schedules, the lesson plans and how to assess...

At the time of my research, Patricia (Site A) had been implementing the NCS for three years without receiving any training. All three participants (Jane, Anna and Patricia) stated that they “figured it out” for themselves, using the NCS policy and Foundation Phase guidelines documents to do so.

Although Paige (Site A) stated that she *adopted* the NCS, she also stated that she regarded the NCS only as a “guideline”. During my fieldwork in 2009, Paige received her first ever visit from a district departmental official, who was impressed with her classroom teaching but not with her lesson plans. As a result, Paige was compelled to change her planning to reflect the design features of the NCS, and stated that it amounted to a drastic increase in her administrative workload.

Paige: I do not even know anymore why I became a teacher. I am swamped with paper work. I feel as if I am a secretary. It is so much work. I do not get time for anything else. I am exhausted.

In contrast to Paige (Site A), Anna (Site B) and Jane (Site C), Isabel (Site D) argued that the benefits of planning according to the NCS outweighed the negative aspects.

Isabel: People always complain that the new statement forces them to do a lot of paperwork but it actually gives teaching more structure...The national curriculum statement forces all the schools to use one system... it's easier to communicate with other teachers what you've been doing in your class.

When I first met Paige (Site A) at the beginning of 2009, she stated, “I am planning my lessons the same way I always have”. By the middle of 2009, her lesson plans were compliant with the Department of Education’s requirements. In addition, Paige noted that the instructions she received from district officials were clearer than before and that she understood what was required of her. However, 2009 was the sixth year of the implementation of the NCS in Grade R.²⁶ As her lesson plans reflect, Paige initially planned according to the actual sequence of activities in her daily programme. Despite complying with the planning requirements, Paige noted:

Paige: Can I be honest with you? I do not even look at it (my written lesson plans). I just follow my weekly forecast.²⁷

This suggests that Paige’s compliance with the curriculum change was superficial.

As mentioned previously in section 5.5.2, the Grade R teachers at Site D also regarded the planning requirements as having resulted in the intensification of their workload. As a result, they *adopted* what they termed “an innovative team approach” to curriculum planning and implementation. Takalani, Natasha, Jackie, Reinnette and Isabel noted that they began their annual curriculum planning with group discussions of what they wanted to achieve during the year. This formed the basis of their work schedules, lesson plans, classroom activities and assessment tasks. Each teacher planned two themes per quarter. This included the preparation of all the required learning and teaching support materials, such as story illustrations, literacy flashcards and other apparatus. Their approach was developed as a solution to the time-consuming administrative tasks related to the NCS requirements.

²⁶ It has taken six years because Grade R has gradually been phased-in since 2001 when the White Paper No. 5 on ECD was introduced.

²⁷ Paige’s “weekly forecast” consisted of a single page summary of her written lesson plans for the week.

Takalani: All five Grade R teachers sit together and consider what we need to achieve for the year, what fits with the various themes. And then we sit with our assessment tasks, we plan that and then we go to our lessons, we then design activities that will suit the theme and the assessment standards and learning outcomes.

Isabel said that it had been easy to *adopt* her colleagues' team approach to curriculum planning when she commenced her teaching career the previous year.

Isabel: We are very lucky in the sense that all our planning is already linked to the national curriculum and the learning outcomes and assessment standards. Therefore, we know that everything we do is useful. Some people say they don't implement the national curriculum because they don't see how it relates, but once you really start working with it, whatever they've been doing for the past twenty years fits in with it anyway.

Takalani and Natasha were GDE master trainers on the NCS and facilitated training for teachers at other schools. Despite their identical written planning, all the participants at Site D pointed out that deviation was possible because each teacher could adapt the plan according to her "individual teaching style".

Isabel: Even though we all have the same planning, the five Grade R classes, we each have our own style of teaching and the children guide us.

In addition, they noted that it was important to be flexible during the execution of the lesson plan in order to accommodate learners' individual needs and responses to lessons, especially if their learners required additional challenges or support. According to these teachers, their flexibility in *adapting* their lesson plans meant that learners' prior knowledge and experiences could also be accommodated. Isabel further noted that the teachers allowed learners' interests to direct the teaching and learning process.

Isabel: We let the children's personalities and their previous knowledge guide us in what we are supposed to be doing. Sometimes I have a lesson planned and we have our activities for the day but then the children will come and they will say, "oh but look, I got this yesterday" and if the children are interested in that you take it from there.

Isabel incorporated her learners' comments and questions into her lesson presentations more than any other teacher participant did.

5.5.4 Content

Although the principals or heads of departments and officials from the District Department of Education monitored teachers' lesson plans, the Grade R teachers said that they did not receive feedback on the content of their lesson plans. According to the Grade R teachers, the most important thing for departmental officials was whether their planning illustrated that they followed the NCS.

The Foundation Phase is especially important for the development of language proficiency. By the end of Grade 3, learners must be able to read and write. For this reason, 40% of the Grade R daily schedule is devoted to literacy (National Department of Education 2003). The Grade R teachers at Sites B and D *adopted* home language instruction, since their learners all spoke Sepedi and Afrikaans at home respectively.²⁸ The Grade R teachers at Sites A and C pointed out that home language instruction was not possible for them because their learners had diverse home languages. Their schools were historically English-medium and they opted to retain English as the language of instruction.²⁹ Since the majority of their learners were not learning in their home language, the Grade R teachers at Sites A and C noted that this affected the content of their lesson planning. In particular, they focused extensively on developing oral language skills because their learners' English communication skills were limited. Jane stressed that some of her learners were unable to communicate in English at all at the beginning of the Grade R year.³⁰ She therefore devoted a considerable amount of time to teaching them English.

5.5.5 Assessment

The participant teachers adopted the new assessment requirements and were unanimous that the NCS contained clear assessment requirements and that teachers needed to be mindful of how their lesson planning was linked to the assessment of learning. Therefore, when teachers planned their lessons, they simultaneously planned for assessment. All the Grade R teachers indicated which assessment standards they were working towards in

²⁸ Information provided by the Grade R teachers participating in this study.

²⁹ The learners at Sites A and C spoke a range of official South African languages as well as international languages (specifically French and Portuguese).

³⁰ According to Jane, these learners and their parents did not have the option of home language instruction because they originated from other African countries and their home languages included Portuguese and French.

their lesson plans. They agreed that assessment strategies for Grade R should be informal.

Jane: The NCS is useful because we now know what to assess. However, what I find difficult is that our activities are so vast in comparison to what they expect. I sometimes find it difficult to incorporate my activities with the actual assessments because I am doing so much more ... It actually does not make sense to me ... I do not think that Grade R should be like the other grades.

All nine participant teachers said that they divided the assessment standards for Grade R into four groups, one for each quarter of the school year. Once each assessment standard was covered, the teachers did not focus on it again. For example, in the quotation below, Takalani described how the 142 assessment standards for Grade R, across the eight learning areas of the NCS, determined the content of learning, teaching and assessment.

Takalani: We take all the assessment standards and we divide them according to the four terms. During each term, we then only assess one lot of things. If a child does not achieve certain assessment standards, it carries over to the next term. Therefore, during the next term we go back to those things. So then you know, the first term I assessed this, the child can do it. What the child did not achieve I will focus on during the following term.

The participant teachers held similar beliefs about how teachers should conduct assessment. For example, Anna stated that assessment should mainly occur through observation and should be unobtrusive so as not to detract from the learners' enjoyment of learning. In addition, she noted that assessment should be ongoing and should focus on all domains of the learner's development.

Anna: I assess my learners individually, according to the ASs... I assess every day, while they are playing outside, how they are listening, how they are eating, whether they are sharing with each other while they are playing, whether they are communicating with each other. In addition, I watch them during the story and that is when I record.

Jackie noted that recording assessment was also a continuous process.

Jackie: Assessment is a continuous process. We do it every day. Each of us has a file with class lists and as we present our lessons and cover particular

learning outcomes with their assessment standards, we note it on the class list and later record it on the department's assessment sheets.

Patricia's lesson planning was very detailed and revealed careful monitoring of each learner's skills and development throughout the Grade R year. She kept a detailed record of each learner's progress towards his or her attainment of the assessment standards.

5.5.6 Integration

All the teachers who participated in this study *adopted* the use of themes as an organisational framework and planned related activities for the three learning programmes, namely literacy, numeracy and life skills. The written planning of the Grade R teachers at Site D reflected a heavy reliance on themes and the majority of their activities were based on the chosen theme. However, although a theme was indicated in their written planning, some of their activities were unrelated to both the theme and the three learning programmes. For example, although Paige (Site A), Patricia (Site A), Anna (Site B) and Jane (Site C) planned according to the Foundation Phase learning programmes, there was limited articulation among the activities for literacy, numeracy and life skills. As a result, in many instances there was no clear connection between the theme and their classroom activities. This reveals pedagogical shortcomings. All the teacher participants described the sequence and content of their daily programme. They explained how each activity targeted one or more domains of learner development. All the Grade R teachers mentioned that they integrated the eight learning areas into the three Foundation Phase learning programmes.

Takalani: I think you need to look at your child. Then you decide. If the children require more stimulation, you would do much more around your interest table and group discussions and your language extension. Then you look at the skills that they still need to acquire and you focus on developing those skills.

The participants at Site D stated that they planned for all domains of development according to the needs of their learners.³¹ This is reflected in their written lesson plans (see Appendix 11). The theme provided the focus for the entire daily programme. There was strong articulation between the theme and the activities for the literacy, numeracy and life skills learning programmes. In addition, Takalani, Natasha, Reinnette, Jackie and

³¹ The domains of development include physical, social, emotional, cognitive or intellectual, aesthetic and moral development.

Isabel highlighted the importance of planning outdoor play activities. This is consistent with their views on the way in which Grade R learners should be taught and what they should learn. Patricia (Site A) described how her lesson planning integrated different skills.

Patricia: I think the assessment of the children is different. I plan my activities according to how far the assessment has progressed and I plan my activities so that they are progressive ... I am not just looking at cutting skills. I am looking at whether they follow instructions. Can they cut? Can they paste? I have tried to integrate it more. I think the [national curriculum] statement is more of an integration using all the skills.

In addition, Paige and Patricia's (Site A) second set³² of planning illustrates that they followed a whole Foundation Phase lesson plan.³³ They linked their lesson plans to skills, knowledge, values and attitudes (SKVAs) as illustrated in Appendix 14.

The Grade R teachers at Site D also stated that they planned for "differentiation"³⁴, in that their written lesson plans could be *adapted* to accommodate the diverse needs, interests and abilities of their learners. The way in which they achieved this is not indicated in their written lesson plans.

5.5.7 Policy Time Allocations

Anna was the only participant whose planning clearly indicated that she *adopted* the time allocations stipulated by policy, the National Curriculum Statement.³⁵ The 26 Grade R assessment standards for the learner's first additional language also feature in Anna's lesson planning. Anna was the only participant who focused on first additional language by planning additional language activities. She taught English as the first additional language to her Sepedi learners. No other participant mentioned the assessment of additional language learners.³⁶ In Anna's case, this encroached on the 40% of time allocated for first

³² Their first set of planning consisted of a single-page table that summarised the objectives and materials of their main activities for the week.

³³ The whole Foundation Phase lesson plan contains the planning of lessons for the entire Foundation Phase.

³⁴ The term differentiation is used to refer to activities with varying degrees of complexity to accommodate learners' diverse needs, interests and abilities.

³⁵ The time allocation for the Foundation Phase Learning Programmes is 40% Literacy, 35% Numeracy and 25% Life Skills.

³⁶ Additional language learners are not learning in their home language but in their first or second additional language.

language development and instruction, since she was teaching two different languages in the same time allocation. As noted by Johnson (2005), choosing to learn in an additional language in Grade R is due to parents' demands that their children learn English as soon as possible. However, teachers are not required to introduce an additional language before Grade 3. By the end of the Foundation Phase³⁷, many African schools switch to English as the Language of Learning and Teaching (LoLT).

5.5.8 Progression

The sequence, content and structure of lesson plans should promote a logical progression of learning. This should reveal how teachers will stimulate their learners' prior knowledge, how that prior knowledge relates to new knowledge and how the activities done in the classroom link to assessment. There should also be articulation across learning programmes, work schedules and lesson plans. Since the Grade R teachers randomly assigned assessment standards to four sets of themes (as noted in section 5.5.5), one for each quarter of the school year, it appears that they are not consciously planning for the progression of learning. Only Patricia (Site A) mentioned the importance of planning for progression. However, she worked towards the attainment of the assessment standards very gradually, which suggests that she was unaware that they are only minimum requirements. This contrasts with Site D's participants who emphasised that the assessment standards are merely the minimum requirements for each grade.

Patricia: I think it gives you a clear indication of what you're supposed to be teaching, you're given pretty clear guidelines on the assessments that you should be making and that's what I base my activities on—the assessments, which is a progressive thing that we're supposed to be doing, that's basically what I base my activities on.

5.5.9 Differentiation

All the participant teachers stated that they were mindful of their learners' diverse needs and abilities. They therefore planned for a variety of activities that would maintain their learners' interest and active participation.

Despite all the participant teachers mentioning the importance of accommodating a range of needs and abilities, only Paige and Patricia's combined lesson plans included

³⁷ The Foundation Phase is from Grade R to Grade 3.

'expanded opportunities'³⁸ and planning for learners who required additional support to achieve the assessment standards. These two participants were also able to explain how they *adapted* their activities to accommodate learners who required either additional challenges or additional support.

5.5.10 Review and Reflection

Only the participant teachers at Site D stressed the importance of the continuous reflection and improvement of their lesson plans. Planning for one year formed the basis of the following year's planning, which was *adapted* to suit the needs of their learners. Takalani, Reinnette, Natasha, Jackie and Isabel met weekly to plan and review their work schedules and lesson plans, and to reflect on their planning and instructional practice. They regarded this as an essential part of effective learning and teaching. All five teachers spoke about "ongoing learning", "constant improvement" and professional development, stating that, "you never know it all" and "you can always improve".

Isabel: Last year we planned all this year's lessons. We take each theme, we think about activities that link with that theme, and we think about activities we haven't done yet, what learning outcomes we haven't really done and we try to find things that can fill it up so that we cover all the outcomes and all the assessment standards. And the easiest thing, because we did it last year it's now just a repetition and things that didn't work last year, we put new things in and if we come across new ideas we put them in, we do this on a weekly basis. Then we know the lessons are all planned and ready.³⁹

5.5.11 Transition to Grade 1

Although all the participant teachers were unanimous in the belief that they were responsible for ensuring that their learners were prepared for the demands of formal learning in Grade 1, the approached learners' transition to Grade 1 in different ways. Some deliberately planned for transitions, while others were only mindful that their learners needed to be well prepared for Grade 1.

Only the participant teachers at Site D consciously planned for their learners' transition to Grade 1. Phatudi (2007) notes that very few teachers plan for transitions even though she

³⁸ Expanded opportunities refers to more cognitively challenging activities.

³⁹ The Grade R teachers at Site D also mentioned that they planned and prepared their learning and teaching support materials two weeks in advance

regards this as essential to learners' adjusting to Grade 1. Throughout the year, Takalani, Reinnette, Natasha, Jackie and Isabel held regular combined activities with the Grade R and the Grade 1 classes. Their learners met their Grade 1 teachers before the end of the Grade R year. The learning and teaching activities were also more structured towards the end of the Grade R year. Anna and Patricia said that they taught their learners "the skills they require in Grade 1". These skills related to gross and fine motor skills, perceptual motor skills and cognitive skills such as problem solving and language skills.

5.5.12 Summary of Findings related to Lesson Planning

As illustrated above, teachers' lesson planning is an individual activity although the teachers at Site D took turns to plan for the whole group and they regularly met to review their planning.

The Grade R teachers *adopted* the planning requirements of the NCS. They agreed that despite the fact that the complex planning requirements of the NCS was very time consuming and increased their workload, there were several benefits to the system. In particular, it had made their teaching more focused, organised and systematic. With the exception of the Grade R teachers at Site D⁴⁰, their main concern was the lack of feedback on their planning. They constantly asked me to evaluate their planning documentation, saying, "You teach this at the university". I explained that I could not do so because it would conflict with my role as a researcher

5.5.13 What does Grade R teachers' lesson planning reveal about their responses to curriculum change?

The teacher participants' lesson planning revealed their compliance with the curriculum policy, since all participants either *adopted* or *adapted* the NCS requirements for lesson planning. The Grade R teachers were aware that they would be assessed against their planning documentation. Furthermore, their lesson plans revealed their conceptual understanding of the NCS and their pedagogical knowledge. Participants with lower qualifications were more reliant on scripted materials. Paradoxically, the fully qualified teachers at Site D said that they had found that the NCS encouraged creativity. In addition, the qualified teachers consulted a wide range of resources to "get fresh ideas", and said that they continuously reflected upon and revised their planning. All the Grade R teachers

⁴⁰ The Grade R teachers at Site D were confident that their planning was correct. As noted previously, two of the five participants were previously master trainers on the NCS.

agreed that the NCS demanded more intensive and time consuming planning, but that it was essential to be organised so that their teaching efforts would be more focused.

5.6 Classroom Practices

In this section, I describe the classroom practices I observed during lesson presentations that were based on the planning documentation discussed in the previous section.

Sub-question ii: Which classroom practices do Grade R teachers employ?

5.6.1 Grade R Philosophy and Pedagogy

When asked to describe their classroom practices, the Grade R teachers were unanimous that Grade R was a specialised programme that differed significantly from the rest of the Foundation Phase. In particular, the Grade R teachers agreed that Grade R learners should learn through play and that the entire curriculum should be informal. Hirsh-Pasek *et al.* (2009) describe this philosophy as “playful learning”. The Grade R teachers pointed out that the NCS infringed on this because of its emphasis on the acquisition of formal skills. The Grade R teachers were unanimous in the belief that they aimed to develop their learners holistically, i.e. in all developmental domains.

Interviewer: How should Grade R be taught?

Reinnette: Definitely through play. In the Foundation Phase, the whole approach to teaching children is formal. All we do is play. Well not really, our whole teaching methodology is learning through play but the children cut and paste and paint every day. It is all about creativity and outdoor play. You cannot believe at the end of the year when you stand back, how much the children have developed. Learning is play. Play is learning. That is how you will get children ready for Grade 1.

With the exception of the Grade R teachers at Site D, the teachers were unsure of how to integrate the NCS into play-based activities. Instead, they presented formal academic tasks such as skill drills⁴¹, and some gave their learners homework. However, all the Grade R teachers, including those at Site D, used worksheets at least once a day. Therefore, despite saying that learners should learn through informal, play-based

⁴¹ For example, they practised skills such as the pencil grip, cutting along lines, letter formation, number formation, rote counting and reciting the alphabet, the days of the week and months of the year on a daily basis.

activities, they all presented formal activities to some extent. All the Grade R teachers asserted that they regarded worksheets as a preparation activity for formal learning.

Despite being the only participant who had not had any formal ECE training, Jane (Site C) was also the only participant who noted that teachers could present worksheets in developmentally appropriate and fun ways.

Jane: The best way for a child to learn is through play. They need to develop their gross motor skills; they need a lot of outdoor play (and) fine motor development, which is very important and perceptual development. They need to see how things are done. Everything must be concrete for the Grade Rs... I would convert the worksheet into a board game.

Jane was articulate regarding the differences in classroom practices between Grade R teachers and their Foundation Phase counterparts. She noted that there were increasing tensions between her and her Foundation Phase colleagues because of their lack of understanding of the Grade R teaching methodology and pedagogy. Similarly to Jane, Natasha (Site D) could explain the differences between Grade R and Grade 1. For example, she noted that Grade 1 teachers did not know what Grade R teachers did to prepare their learners for formal schooling. She emphasised that through outdoor free play, learners develop abilities such as hanging onto a bar of the jungle gym with their arms. This in turn develops their muscle tone⁴², which is essential for concentration during classroom activities. Natasha began teaching Grade R in 2009 after being a Grade 1 teacher for 19 years which gave her a unique understanding of both Grade R and Grade 1.

Natasha: We are working hard, especially since I have come from Grade 1. I enjoy knowing where I am going. Therefore, I think it is important for a Grade 1 teacher to see "Wow! This is everything that these teachers are doing to prepare the children for us". Personally I think, especially regarding the outdoor play, I want it to be more structured.

The Grade R teachers also agreed that they had changed their instructional practices when they adopted the NCS. For example, Jackie noted:

⁴² Muscle tone helps concentration by enabling children to sit upright. Children with low toned muscles tire quickly and tend to be restless and fidgety.

Jackie: Where we used to drill the answers into the learners, we must now teach them to discover it for themselves... through what they are doing, what is right and wrong so that they can explain what is right and wrong. I find that wonderful. They do not need us to give them the answers.

The above quotation suggests that Jackie grasped the implications of the constructivist approach and her role as a facilitator of learning. In Anna's (Site B) opinion, the NCS, combined with her relocation to a state primary school, significantly influenced her instructional practices. She believes that she has become a better teacher. However, although she expressed the opinion that learning should be informal, her learners completed formal academic tasks, in particular worksheets that required them to write.

Takalani, Natasha, Jackie, Reinnette and Isabel (Site D) pointed out that it was possible to be relaxed because the majority of their learners had prior preschool experiences and early stimulation in childcare settings as well as from their parents at home. They were also confident that their classroom practices were consistent with international best practice in preschool teaching. These participants noted that they could therefore extend their learners' prior learning experiences since they were already familiar with classroom routines and procedures. In addition, they noted that there was a seamless progression from the pre-reception year programme to Grade R and onto Grade 1. As a result, they were able to prioritize the well-being of their learners while still meeting the requirements of the official curriculum. Moreover, this explains why it was possible for them to "go beyond the curriculum" and do much more than the official curriculum required. They stressed that this did not mean that they proceeded with formal academic work, but rather that they were able to offer their learners opportunities for the reinforcement, practice and enrichment of the basic assessment standards.

Interviewer: What should children learn in Grade R?

Takalani: The most important skill is for the child to develop a positive self-concept and to believe in himself... It is important that we do not yet do formal work with them. So the skills are related to his physical development, language skills, everything through play.

Jackie: Every child must be treated as an individual according to their individual needs... emotional needs must be addressed. In addition, for next year (Grade 1), emotional intelligence is an important need so I think they need strong emotional support. I would say that activities need to ensure that the child

experiences success, they must be able to achieve it because it influences their emotional development.

As illustrated in the comments above, Jackie and Reinnette were mainly concerned about learners' emotional development. Although Takalani mentioned the importance of each learner developing a positive self-image, she included other domains of development, particularly physical and language (cognitive) development, as important areas. Jackie was the only member of the group who specifically mentioned social development. Significantly, they viewed Grade R as part of a progression of development and not as an isolated year-long programme. They all stated that they felt positive about the curriculum change and that they adjusted their teaching to meet the demands of the official curriculum. However, they readily admitted that they found some aspects of the curriculum challenging to implement, such as allowing children to take a more active role in their own learning.

Takalani, Natasha, Jackie, Reinnette and Isabel appeared to have a sound conceptual understanding of the official curriculum. However, they argued that with the exception of the time consuming planning requirements, there was not a major difference between the old and the new curriculum. They pointed out that the changes in their pedagogy were limited to their interactions with learners and the range of teaching strategies at their disposal, such as group work. Although Natasha, Jackie and Reinnette argued that a "mind shift" was initially required when implementing the new curriculum, Takalani stated,

Takalani: I think it was very important for schools that the entire approach to education changed. As far as Grade R education is concerned, the changes were not that radical. Mainly things got new names. In Grade R education, we have always been doing outcomes-based education.

Takalani therefore believed that Grade R teachers were not implementing curriculum change because their existing practices were already compliant with the principles of the NCS.

5.6.2 Daily Programme and Routines

The daily programme consists of an outline of activities and routines that Grade R teachers follow in much the same sequence each day. The daily activities usually have the same duration and occur at roughly the same time each day. All the Grade R teachers noted that have always followed the same daily programme consisting of a variety of

structured, or teacher-directed, activities, free choice activities and routines for simple activities such as tidying up or going to the bathroom. It should be noted that the daily programme itself is viewed as a “routine”. According to the participant teachers, routines are important because when the learners know what to expect, they feel more secure in themselves. Paige noted that if she left out an activity that was usually included in the sequence of daily activities, her learners would remind her that it still needed to be completed.

The sequence of daily activities is reminiscent of traditional preschool programmes. All the participant teachers noted that each day began with a morning ring⁴³, consisting of greeting each other, taking the attendance register, a bible story⁴⁴, prayers, learner’s news, weather, Letter Land™ or Thrass™ and a themed discussion.⁴⁵ The participant teachers explained that sharing their news allowed learners to speak about their families and that this gave the teachers insight into their learners’ domestic situations. As the learners told their news aloud to the class, the teacher wrote a sentence or two on a flip chart (modeling writing). Thereafter, the learner drew a picture about their news on the flip chart.

The participant teachers tended to focus on a specific aspect of the theme each day in the theme discussion. For example, if the theme was wild animals, the teacher would focus on a specific type of wild animal each day. The discussion would include aspects such as the appearance and characteristics of the animal, where it lived and what it ate. The theme table contained a display of posters, pictures and objects related to the discussion. Anna was the only teacher who did not have a theme area in her classroom. Although during interviews the Grade R teachers stated that the learners guide the lessons and are more active participants than before the NCS was introduced, their lesson presentations suggest that learners have limited influence on the content or manner in which the lesson unfolded. For example, if a learner said, “a pony is a wild animal”, the teacher would respond, “no, we’re not talking about that now” without clarifying whether or not a pony was a wild animal. Anna’s learners mainly responded “yes” or “no” to her questions, suggesting the absence of higher order questions. Jane provided a great deal of information on the theme and did not ask questions. Instead, she repeatedly enquired, “Are you listening? You need

⁴³ “Rings” are also referred to as “circle time” in the international literature. It is a whole class activity, directed by the teacher.

⁴⁴ Despite the National Policy on Religion and Education (2003) stating that bible stories should not be part of the curriculum, all nine participants are still presenting (telling or reading) bible stories on a daily basis.

⁴⁵ Letter Land™ and Thrass™ are phonics programmes designed to help learners to read, write and spell.

to know this in Grade 1". Several participants noted that they perceived themselves to be under pressure to cover what they planned and therefore could not allow the learners to sidetrack them. This is similar to Hacker and Rowe's (1998:95) observation that official curricula are overloaded, resulting in ECE teachers needing to cover more curriculum content than they did previously.

The Grade R teachers at Site D pointed out that the morning ring presented an opportunity to integrate many learning areas and to cover all three Foundation Phase learning programmes. For example, Isabel stated that her discussion of the days of the week (the number and names of the days of the week)⁴⁶, the seasons of the year and the weather conditions dealt with the passage of time and included both literacy and numeracy. Isabel stressed that she implemented the NCS "all the time... integrated into all activities".

After the theme discussion, the Grade R teachers introduced the day's creative art activities such as modeling clay or dough, painting, drawing, cutting and pasting, collage, box construction and weaving activities. These activities varied each day so that learners could experience and experiment with a variety of materials and techniques. For example, drawing activities were offered using charcoal, pencils, oil pastels, crayons, pencil crayons or felt tip pens and the teachers rotated the materials. In addition, there was most often a choice available from a variety of activities prepared by the teacher.

The Grade R teachers at Site D put their learners into groups, and each group completed an activity before moving onto the next one, until all the activities were completed by all the learners. During this time, the teacher moved from group to group, commenting on what they were doing, offering suggestions and assisting those who needed help. They also reminded their learners to "use enough glue" so that their pictures would stick to the page, to "cut along the lines" and to "colour in between the lines" and in one direction. The teachers emphasised that a variety of skills were acquired through these activities, including decision making when choosing an activity, completing the activity they chose, sharing materials, tidying up where they had worked before moving on to the next activity and cooperating with peers during group activities. Site D's participants did not combine indoor free play with the creative art activities. Instead, their learners engaged in free play

⁴⁶ Learners completed the weather chart each morning. It required them to complete the following sentences: "Today is ... Yesterday was ... Tomorrow will be ..." using flashcards printed with the names of the days of the week.

activities prior to commencing the daily programme as they arrived in the morning or while they waited for their parents to fetch them in the afternoon.

With the exception of Paige, Patricia and Anna, the Grade R teachers offered a choice of four or five activities during indoor free play. In addition to creative art activities, teachers allowed their learners to play freely in the fantasy area, book area, discovery area, block area and writing area. In some cases, the teachers insisted that art activities should be completed before allowing their learners access to other areas.

The second ring of the day consisted of music or movement activities. Singing and dancing were included in all nine teachers' daily routines. At Sites A and C, music activities featured more prominently than movement activities. At Site B, music and movement activities were integrated into literacy and numeracy activities. For example, Anna presented a numeracy lesson on the number five. While her learners sang, they clapped their hands five times, hopped five times and stamped their feet five times.

At Site D, the learners had separate music and movement activities. Once a week, movement activities took place on the sports field. Activities such as throwing balls, balancing on beams and hopping from hoop to hoop were presented as group activities. In addition, a part-time music teacher presented a theme-related music ring once a week.

In all instances, the daily programme concluded with a story ring. Some participants told a story using illustrations such as puppets or pictures, while others read the story directly from a children's book. All the Grade R teachers viewed the story ring as an informal and relaxed activity. They stated that they encouraged their learners to develop a love for books and reading. The Grade R teachers at Site D noted that they often presented joint story rings and puppet theatres for all five Grade R classes.

With the exception of Anna, the Grade R teachers noted that they alternated structured activities with free choice activities. The Grade R teachers at Site D noted that they designed a large variety of activities to meet the holistic needs of their learners. In addition to the activities mentioned above, they presented technology and science activities, educational games such as building puzzles and Lego™ construction, water play, sand play and food preparation activities. The daily programme was uninterrupted and they remained with their learners from 07:00 until 13:30. The preschool staff observed and supervised the outdoor play area from seven "observation points" located next to the apparatus.

Jane and Anna noted that they accommodated the three Foundation Phase learning programmes in their daily programmes (see lesson in appendix 11).

Jane: Once the children have all arrived in the morning we do numeracy—the date and the calendar and literacy—the theme discussion. Then we do the lesson that has been planned for the day... Then we have our lunch break and then we have life skills then we go outdoors to play and then it is time to go home or to after-care.

Anna: In the morning, the children arrive and we go to assembly. We have a prayer and then go back to class. Then we start with greeting each other. Asking each other ‘how do you feel?’ We talk about our birthdays and our weather chart. Then we can start with our numeracy programme and then we do literacy and then life skills. That is what we do for the whole day. We paint, we cut, we paste, we draw, and we do exercises outside. It depends on our theme.

Jane noted that a large number of her learners had to get up very early in the morning because they travelled a long distance to get to the school. She therefore allowed them to sleep on a mat for up to an hour before starting her activities, which greatly reduced her teaching time. When some of the children were sleeping, the rest of the class engaged in free choice indoor activities such as puzzles, reading books or fantasy play.

Reinnette stated that although teachers followed their lesson plans as far as possible, it was also important to be flexible.

Reinnette: The typical school day, at least how it's on paper, is what you follow each day. You plan certain activities and then there are the routines... However, it does not always happen exactly in that order. Often the moms want to chat to you, so you may be busier in the mornings, or you may have a sick learner or a heart sore learner so you always have to be well prepared so that everything is ready but you also have to be flexible. If a child is not well, that is your priority. Sometimes the programme is disrupted by the school's extra-curricular activities if these occur during school time.

5.6.3 Rapport with Learners during Lesson Presentations

All the participant teachers, with the exception of Patricia, mentioned the importance of establishing a rapport with their learners and getting to know them, their backgrounds and

their home circumstances well. Some of them noted that they were substitute mothers to their learners while they were at school. The participant teachers frequently mentioned that their learners' happiness was a priority. They generally smiled a great deal during their lesson presentations and appeared relaxed. As noted at the start of this chapter, the participant teachers stated that they would do whatever it took "to get the learner going" (Jane), and that the teachers' role included entertaining the learners (Takalani and Natasha). Several participants voluntarily mentioned that they enjoyed their work. Bearing this in mind, note the contrast between the two extracts below::

Extract 1: Observation notes, February 2009

Paige kicked off her high-heeled sandals and danced among her learners while they sang together. The classroom atmosphere is relaxed and busy. The learners appear carefree and happy. They seem eager to please her. They keenly follow her instructions, promptly respond to instructions and participate actively. Everyone is smiling.

Extract 2: Observation notes, February 2009

Patricia sat at her desk calling out instructions. She frequently raised her voice and sounded impatient. She repeatedly instructed her learners to listen and pay attention and not to speak to members of their group while they were completing their worksheets.

5.6.4 Classroom Management

The Grade R teachers' classrooms strongly resembled informal preschool environments. This was most noticeable at Site D, since the Grade R classes were part of the preschool section of the primary school and separate from the rest of the school. Takalani, Natasha, Reinnette, Isabel and Jackie emphasised that their learners were still too young for too much structure. For example, they stated that their learners could snack from their lunchboxes if they were hungry at any time during the daily programme. They also emphasised the importance of allowing learners to choose their own activities from a range of activities prepared by the teacher.

The two Grade R classrooms at Site A were located at the back of the school and slightly apart from the rest of the school. However, Paige and Patricia differed in their classroom management approaches. Paige's learners appeared free and the noise level was consistent with a busy and active classroom. On the other hand, the atmosphere in Patricia's classroom was much more controlled. Throughout the first lesson I observed, Patricia constantly reprimanded her learners, saying, "you're not listening". On my second visit to Patricia's classroom, the atmosphere was far more relaxed. Patricia was actively involved with the learners at their tables while they were engaged in group work activities and lively discussions as they cut and pasted pictures from newspapers and catalogues. The learners appeared to be enjoying the activity and helped tidy up the classroom afterwards. On the first occasion, my presence as a researcher may have inhibited Patricia, but this disruption seemed to have decreased by my second visit. One consistent observation was Patricia's efficient classroom management. Her classroom had a low noise level, which is atypical for Grade R. Perhaps this was consistent with the fact that her priority is to prepare her learners for formal school.

Sites B and C's Grade R classes were located next door to the Grade 1 classes. The Grade R teachers at these sites frequently reminded their learners to lower their voices so as not to disturb the neighbouring classes.

5.6.5 Continuous Assessment

The Grade R teachers continuously assessed their learners, and said that they preferred informal assessment methods, particularly observation. As the Grade R teachers presented their lessons, they took note of their learners' attainment of the assessment standards. Everyone did this, except Paige, as indicated below.

Paige: We cover all the assessments. At the end of the year I say, "Right, have I gone through this assessment standard, yes, yes, yes, yes, yes, yes". I make sure I cover all the assessment standards. However, I do not go and say, "Right, I'm doing this activity, which assessment standard links up with this activity?" I do not do that. I do my prep as normal and then just make sure I cover all the assessment standards, by the end of the year.

During separate interviews, Takalani, Natasha, Reinnette, Isabel and Jackie all stressed that the official curriculum specifies "the very minimum requirements" for each grade. This

contrasts with Paige and Patricia's (Site A) view that the assessment standards denote exactly what should be achieved by the end of the year.

Natasha: I assess continuously. I am among the children the whole time, involved with them. This morning, quite incidentally, I noticed a child who needs assistance with his pencil grip. Then I made a note of it so that I remember that I have to check it again.

Patricia noted that the results of Grade R assessments determine the learners' readiness for school. She noted that the Department of Education, and even more so the parents, held teachers accountable for their learner's progress. This is consistent with the international literature on "high stakes assessment".

5.6.6 The Prevalence of Worksheets

All the Grade R teachers presented worksheets⁴⁷ as either a group or whole class activity and either separately or part of indoor free play. Paige, Patricia and Anna used literacy and numeracy worksheets extensively. Jane largely used life skills worksheets. Paige also sent worksheets home as homework tasks to "foster parent involvement". The Grade R teachers at Site D stated that they favoured perceptual worksheets to develop perceptual skills.

All the participant teachers used worksheets on a daily basis and agreed that one of the reasons for doing so was preparing their learners for Grade 1, which required familiarising them with worksheets. Furthermore, producing tangible evidence of learning was often the underlying motivation for the use of workbooks and worksheets.

Patricia pointed out that although parents in particular placed pressure on teachers to demonstrate tangible evidence of their children's learning and development, it was difficult for Grade R teachers to produce this evidence.

Patricia: It is very difficult to justify to parents how much work you have done if you cannot put it in a file. Not everything you do can be put in a file. Like sequencing and threading, and fine motor. These things cannot be put in a file; their gross motor skills, their social skills, they cannot be put in a file.

⁴⁷ The learners were very enthusiastic to complete the worksheets. The Grade R teachers noted that parents "like worksheets because it looks like real work".

Paige also noted that she used workbooks because “parents want to see what they are paying for”. In sites with abundant resources, teachers could record learners’ engagement in activities with the use of digital cameras or video recordings⁴⁸; however this is not possible at sites with limited resources.

As noted above, the Grade R teachers at Site D said that they used perceptual worksheets on a daily basis as activity to prepare the learners for formal schooling. This contrasts with Paige’s view that perceptual worksheets were not developmentally appropriate for Grade R learners.

Paige: I do believe that by the time our kids get to Grade 1, they have been exposed to worksheets so they know what to do. It does benefit them. I do not believe that they should be doing perceptual worksheets, I do not, and they are. I am doing four worksheets a week...

5.6.7 Accommodating Parents’ Demands

Several participants argued that the content of their lessons was partly influenced by parental demands, particularly for increasing formal academic skills. These participants emphasised that the majority of parents expected their children to learn to read and write during the Grade R year. Paige noted that parents were enthusiastic about homework tasks such as completing worksheets which required written work to be completed because it “looked like real work to parents”. As illustrated below, Paige also stated that parents had clear expectations of the Grade R programme.

Interviewer: What do parents want their children to learn in Grade R?

Paige: That is a very, very interesting question. Because you know what every single parent says to me? “Is my child ready for Grade 1?” They do not care what they are learning now, their only concern is whether their children will be ready for Grade 1.

5.7 Factors Informing Grade R Teachers’ Responses to Curriculum Change

Sub-question iv. What informs Grade R teachers’ responses to curriculum change?

⁴⁸ One example is the Reggio Emilia programme where teachers have no written planning and the learners’ interests and reactions to exploration of their environment determine the direction of the emergent curriculum. However, these teachers are very highly qualified and are able to follow the children’s interests and facilitate their learning in a dynamic way.

5.7.1 Teacher Capacity

I begin my discussion on the factors informing Grade R teachers' responses to curriculum change by considering their existing capacity to implement the NCS. As noted in Table 5.2, the participant teachers held various qualifications but all except Jane have undergone accredited specialised training on ECE. Jane did not have any formal qualifications but had undergone extensive non-formal NGO training on ECE and GDE training on the NCS.

All the participant teachers were confident in their ability to work with young children. Some of them were more knowledgeable and articulate about the universal milestones, particularly where typically developing five-year-old learners should be in their development at various stages during the Grade R year. For example, Patricia frequently referred to the universal milestones for five-year-olds. Since she had not undergone any training on the NCS, she was using the traditional approach.

As discussed in the literature review in Chapter 2, teachers' responses to curriculum change are categorised according to McLaughlin's (1987) study on the internal and external factors that influence how teachers respond to curriculum change.

5.7.2 External Factors

Professional development, resources and support constitute the main external factors that influence teachers' responses to curriculum change. As noted in section 2.5.2, these are organisational conditions and characteristics of the infrastructure teachers require in order to implement change effectively.

5.7.2.1 Professional Development

In this section, I focus specifically on Continuing Professional Development for Teachers (CPDT). The Grade R teachers regarded continuous professional development as essential for increasing their capacity to implement curriculum change. However, they differed in their opinions on the usefulness of GDE sponsored professional development opportunities. Takalani was critical of the Department of Education's emphasis on the curriculum itself in their professional development programmes. She argued that this was the reason why many teachers did not find departmental training useful.

Takalani: I think as far as the Department of Education is concerned, they focus so strongly on the National Curriculum that they sometimes forget that teachers in Grade R are looking for practical things that they can do.

Similarly, Jane emphasised the need for practically orientated professional development opportunities.

Jane: I think we need more workshops. Workshops not just in the sense of giving us information, but also allowing teachers to do hands-on work. I still remember when I attended workshops 24 years ago it was hands-on. Teachers need to know, "How are we going to apply this?"

It appeared that Grade R teachers' access to training depended largely on how long they had been teaching at state primary schools. If their relocation from community-based or private preschools was relatively recent, their access to training programmes had been very limited when they were employed at other institutions. This implies that Grade R teachers at non-school settings had even more limited access to training on the NCS than their counterparts at primary schools. For example, Patricia has been teaching at a state primary school since 2006, but all her colleagues at the school attended training on the NCS in 2003. It is also worth noting that training followed implementation of curriculum change.

There appeared to be competing priorities for professional development for ECD teachers. On the one hand, teachers required training on the curriculum, and on the other hand, they required training on children's development and teaching methods. In particular, skills programmes appeared to compete with more general qualifications. For example, Patricia, who holds a Level 5 qualification in ECE, noted that it was her understanding that all the GDE-sponsored training opportunities prioritized teachers without NQF Level 4. She noted that this was the reason why she had not attended any GDE professional development, including training on the NCS. She noted, "I am figuring it out for myself". However, she readily acknowledged that she needed training on the planning requirements of the official curriculum.

Patricia: I think you could go through it on your own, even with the amount of experience that I have, but there are certain areas that need clarification. You know, looking through it with somebody else's eyes, they can give you an easier way to do it. This is why I have this book, this works for me. But maybe there is another way. I have not been exposed to it so I do not know.

In addition, Patricia stated that she would like to undergo training that dealt with the assessment requirements of the official curriculum, the different methods of assessment

and “different levels of assessment”. Planning for differentiation and different levels of assessment is especially important within an inclusive classroom where learners have diverse needs, interests and abilities. Differentiation was a challenge mentioned by the fully qualified teachers⁴⁹ as well. Identifying this complex issue demonstrated the depth to which Patricia had grappled with the official curriculum. As noted by Jansen (1999), a sophisticated curriculum such as outcomes-based education demands well trained teachers with access to continuous professional development.

Since her employment at a state primary school, Paige had increased opportunities for ongoing professional development. These training programmes were unrelated to the NCS. Her only training on the NCS was a single five-day-long workshop sponsored by the GDE “back in 2003”. She had not had further training on the NCS specifically, possibly because she already holds a Level 5 Diploma. According to Paige and Patricia, Grade R teacher training programmes were prioritising teachers with Level 4 certificates. During my interview with Paige’s principal, he stated that the GDE would be providing increased opportunities for ongoing professional development for his staff. However, this had not occurred during the period of my fieldwork. In Paige’s opinion, she had limited access to professional development opportunities because “the department’s training is for teachers who still needed to complete Level 4.” She also indicated that she perceived departmental training to be of “poor quality.”

Interviewer: Are you following the official curriculum?

Paige: I do have it (the curriculum policy). Can I be honest with you? I went on the training course and I was very confused, very, very confused. It was like a stack of information, blasted at us at the same time, over one week and we had to know everything. If you ask me, “what’s LO1?” I cannot tell you the LOs and I cannot tell you the assessment standards. I cannot tell you that off by heart. I just look at the policy and that tells me. However, they expected us to be learning this all off by heart and to me that is not my job.

There was a great deal of consistency between Paige’s views and those expressed by her principal. They were in agreement that the Department of Education’s professional development programmes were not useful and that there was insufficient support for Grade R to be implemented effectively in all state primary schools.

⁴⁹ The fully qualified teachers hold the equivalent of Bachelor’s degrees specialising in ECE.

Principal Site A: The Department of Education should give us clear guidelines, exactly what they want... specifically for Grade R and training for teachers...

The principal also expressed concern that the GDE training for Grade R teachers had not led to significant changes in their instructional practice because he “did not observe any major changes ... because the NCS basically ties in with what they are already doing”.

Anna repeatedly noted that she was motivated to study further and that professional development programmes had enabled her to *adopt* the curriculum changes. She regularly attended workshops.

Anna: I can say that this curriculum has influenced my teaching because we have workshops, we are learning skills, and the clusters are useful. That is why I have decided to further my studies. I have started enjoying my teaching.

Takalani, the head of the preschool department at Site D, facilitated on-site training for Natasha, Reinnette, Isabel and Jackie. According to Takalani, the school budgeted for training and every staff member had a minimum of two opportunities per year to attend training. These five teachers were all fully qualified and met the requirements of the Norms and Standards for Educators (2000) since they had four years of specialised ECE teacher training. In addition, some of them were enrolled in postgraduate programmes. They did not find the Gauteng Department of Education’s workshops useful because “we are ahead of what they are offering”. However, although they *ignored* advice from GDE workshops, they continued to attend to ensure that they did not miss anything and remained up-to-date.

Takalani: We have training weekly... I would say, every week in meetings, we focus on something, for example policy documents or how does your classroom look? On the other hand, how do you do outdoor supervision? Every teacher gets an opportunity once a term to attend a course of the AECYC⁵⁰ or the SAOU. Therefore, we give teachers the opportunity. Every year, we budget a certain amount for training. Teachers are encouraged to attend at least one or two courses every year.

All five participant teachers at Site D indicated that they were satisfied with their access to professional development opportunities. They stressed that “one never knows enough”,

⁵⁰ The Association for the Education and Care of Young Children (AECYC).

that they regarded professional development as an ongoing process and that they were committed to ensuring that they kept abreast of developments in order to continuously *adapt* and improve their practice. In addition, they were training teachers at poorer schools to support them in implementing the new curriculum.

(i) Recognition of Prior Learning

Although Jane had no formal qualifications, she has 24 years of experience as an ECE teacher, and entered a Level 5 training programme at the University of South Africa (UNISA) through recognition of prior learning (RPL). She attended several workshops organised and presented by the Gauteng Department of Education. Jane noted that she found the quality of the training impressive because she had learnt a great deal and was implementing the GDE officials' advice in her classroom.

(ii) Unintended Consequences of Professional Development

The participant teachers at Site D were qualified and received salaries comparable to their Foundation Phase counterparts. However, the rest of the Grade R teachers pointed out that professional development would eventually lead to them leaving their Grade R posts in search of better remuneration. For example, Anna noted that she planned to pursue further studies in the Foundation Phase and was likely to teach Grades 1, 2 or 3 in the future. This was the dilemma for all the participant teachers undergoing programmes that would lead to a recognised qualification. They argued that their need for career advancement compelled them to teach higher grades.

5.7.2.2 Resources

In this section, I address human and material or financial resources separately.

(i) Human Resources

Jane was the only participant teacher who had a full-time teaching assistant. She noted that this enabled her to provide her learners with more individual attention. This may also explain why Site C's school fees were the highest. The teachers who did not have full-time teaching assistants said that they had to be present and alert "every second of the day" because it was their responsibility to ensure their learners' safety. They further noted that their ability to provide individual attention was limited. This was especially applicable to Anna who had 46 Grade R learners in her classroom. Paige and Patricia had a ratio of 1:32. The participant teachers at Site D had a ratio of 1:18. In addition, the participant

teachers at Site D had three teaching assistants for their 10 preschool classes. They also noted that they often had students from several higher education institutions doing their practice teaching in their classrooms. The teachers attributed this to the high quality of mentoring the students receive from them. They welcomed the students' presence in their classrooms because it increased their human resource capacity.

Takalani, Natasha, Reinnette, Isabel and Jackie were qualified and therefore collectively constituted a considerable Grade R resource, especially since they worked as a team at the same primary school. Two of them had been master trainers for the GDE when the NCS was introduced and facilitated training for teachers at schools across the district.

(ii) Material Resources

Material resources consist of indoor and outdoor resources that can be used for learning and teaching during the daily programme.

(a) Indoor Resources

Indoor resources refer to learning and teaching resources used inside the classroom. In this regard, the situation of participants differed significantly.

With the exception of Anna, all the participant teachers stated that they were largely satisfied with their indoor resources. Takalani, Reinnette, Isabel, Jackie and Natasha were especially satisfied with what they described as their "typical preschool classrooms". The other three Grade R teachers were unanimous in the belief that their classrooms were not conducive to preschool learning and teaching because they had infrastructural inadequacies, such as insufficient space to accommodate the various discovery areas⁵¹, and limited access to running water and child-size toilets. The most urgent need identified by Anna was books suitable for Grade R learners. She explained that the only books in the classroom belonged to her own children. Anna also identified the need for a sandpit, adequate outdoor space (even though this is not possible due to a lack of space), child-size toilets and hand basins as well as running water inside the classroom. Three of the four research sites had inadequate outdoor play facilities.

⁵¹ Discovery areas inside a preschool classroom include a theme area, nature area, book area, writing area, science area, fantasy area, block area, quiet play area, music area, etc. Grade R teachers combined these areas into a numeracy area, literacy area and life skills area—one dedicated to each Foundation Phase Learning Programme.

Anna: We have limited space and children need space to explore without hurting other children. Therefore, it is just too small even inside the class. Our classrooms are too small for the number of learners. For example, our life skills area is too small. I cannot put ten children there. Even our play area is too small; we do not have shelter there, no trees.

Anna noted that her access to learning and teaching support materials was severely restricted because of her location at a no-fee school. The Grade R learners' were expected to pay school fees of R50 per month, which was specifically intended for purchasing learning and teaching support materials, but the majority of parents were unable to pay due to very high unemployment rates. Anna's principal confirmed that very few parents actually paid the fees on a regular basis and argued that the Department of Education should therefore provide all the required resources.

Takalani, Natasha, Reinnette, Isabel and Jackie stated that they regarded themselves as privileged to be teaching at a well-resourced school. They reported that they had "everything we need" since the school had gradually acquired resources over a 16 year period and that they took great care to ensure that their resources were well maintained. These teachers were therefore able to plan their lessons with a range of resources that they consulted to get "fresh ideas". This also enabled them to constantly review, *adapt* and improve their curriculum planning. During the past three years, they contributed to building up the resources of an inner city school. Although these participants readily acknowledged that their school was well resourced, they stressed that this did not mean that there were no challenges at the school. In particular, the principal, Mike, noted that the majority of buildings were prefabricated and that the school wanted to replace these with brick structures.

Patricia was largely satisfied with her classroom and her indoor resources. She identified her needs as running water inside the classroom and lockers for learners to store their bags so that they would no longer be a tripping hazard. This may have contributed towards her reluctance for her learners to move around the classroom. According to Patricia, the only equipment in her classroom supplied by the Department of Education was a first aid box containing basic supplies such as gloves and plasters.

As expected, the underqualified⁵² Grade R teachers rely heavily on scripted materials, despite having a wealth of practical experience. They were uncertain how to implement the NCS in informal, developmentally appropriate ways. In addition, they perceived themselves as under pressure to ensure that their learners were school ready by the end of the year-long Grade R programme.

(b) Outdoor Resources

All the participant teachers have *adopted* outdoor play as an activity in their daily programmes. Only Site D had a well-resourced outdoor area. Most of them had also *adopted* the department's recommendation that the outdoor play area should be reserved for the exclusive use of the Grade R class. At Sites B, C and D, the outdoor play area was fenced off and older children were not allowed to use the equipment. At Site A, the participant teachers pointed out that they too would be *adopting* the recommendation in the near future, because the children in the after school care programme, who were much heavier than their Grade R learners, had damaged the equipment.

The greatest need Patricia, Paige and Jane identified was for safe and durable outdoor play equipment. They stated that although they wanted to *adopt* this requirement, their schools lacked the money to purchase suitable equipment. The participants at Sites A, B and C all stated that they relied on their principals to improve their outdoor play resources. All three principals also mentioned this as one of their priorities in their resource planning.

5.7.2.3 Support

Teachers need a range of support to enable them to respond positively to the NCS. This is discussed under two separate headings: (a) support from within the school, and (b) support from outside the school.

(i) Within the School

The literature confirms the importance of providing teachers with ongoing school-based support in implementing curriculum change. School-based support includes the provision of instructional leadership as well as support from the principal and Foundation Phase head of department. While the international literature highlights the role of the principal as an instructional leader, this is not applicable in South Africa since policy mandates that instructional leadership should be provided by heads of departments. All four sites

⁵² These teachers are classified as underqualified because their qualifications do not meet the requirements for REQV 14.

principals confirmed that they did not provide instructional leadership and referred any technical questions related to Grade R pedagogy or content to the Foundation Phase head of department. Principals also noted that they relied on the Foundation Phase heads of department for feedback on the Grade R teachers' curriculum implementation. Two of the four principals regularly visited the Grade R classrooms and only one participated in classroom activities.

From the data it emerged that teachers received support from heads of department and officials from the District Department of Education. The participant teachers were unanimous in the view that their principals had created the conditions that enabled them to adopt and adapt the new curriculum. This is consistent with Rosenholtz's (1989:430) view that principals create the organisational features that support curriculum change in schools. Moreover, principals influence the teachers' capacity to implement curriculum change by exhibiting critical support, a desire for change and the belief that change is possible (Hertberg-Davis & Brighton, 2006:90). While external factors affected internal factors, principals themselves greatly influenced internal factors, particularly Grade R teachers' job satisfaction due to remuneration and conditions of service as well as their efficacy, commitment and effectiveness (Day 2008:252) and emotions regarding change (Hargreaves 2005).

There appeared to be very limited pedagogical engagement between Grade R teachers and their principals. The principals were all more knowledgeable about Grade R than the participant teachers credited them to be. Significantly, although several teachers viewed their principals as "ignorant" of Grade R, their principals and the teachers held similar views on the introduction of the NCS in Grade R. This suggests that principals and teachers seldom discussed pedagogical matters. The participating teachers were unaware that all four principals agreed that the NCS was too rigid and formal for Grade R learners. Instead, principals believed that Grade R learners should "mainly be playing". Anna and her principal (Site B) held opposing views on what Grade R learners should be learning. Although her principal stressed the importance of learners being active, learning through play and having fun while learning, Anna's learners sat quietly on the mat most of the time because there was no space for them to move around and play. Similarly, Jane (Site C) was unaware that her principal agreed with her views regarding Grade R pedagogy. Instead, Jane assumed that her principal did not know much about Grade R at all.

As noted previously in section 5.7, Anna stated that she received support from her HoD, Foundation Phase colleagues and GDE officials, especially the GDE officials who facilitated the training sessions she attended and who visited her classroom on an annual basis. Anna was the only participant who received any GDE visits prior to 2009. She noted that these visits aided her in *adopting* the curriculum change. Anna further said that she received support from her Foundation Phase colleagues, especially the Grade 1 teacher, and her HoD, and practical assistance from her colleagues mentioned above, in completing her written lesson planning.

Takalani, Natasha, Reinnette, Isabel and Jackie received a great deal of support from one another. They regarded themselves as friends as well as colleagues. They individually stated that they enjoyed a positive collegial relationship that provided support for them on a professional and personal level. They had worked together for several years and viewed their approach to curriculum planning as fundamentally designed to enable them to work as a collective and to make positive *adaptations* to the curriculum. The rapport among them was obvious. They stated that they enjoyed a strong support network. In particular, within the school, the Grade R teachers received support from the principal, their Foundation Phase colleagues and therapists who rented classrooms on the premises and provided support for the learners. This enabled the teachers to be responsive to individual learners' needs and to provide early identification and intervention where problems occurred.

Takalani: I can also say that we have a very strong support network of therapists. We have an occupational and a speech therapist on the premises... We have very strong support from the therapists. Moreover, if we need anything, the principal is supportive. We actually have a strong support network.

Interviewer: How do you relate to the Foundation Phase teachers at your school?

Reinnette: We have a very open relationship. Once a week, we attend meetings. Because we are working according to the learning outcomes and assessment standards, the Grade 1 teacher can just carry on.

Natasha noted that it was sometimes necessary for Grade R teachers to clarify their curriculum focus for their Grade 1 colleagues:

Natasha: We always have meetings where we sit together and they may say ‘you know, it seems to us that certain things are not yet in place’... then this side will say, ‘no, it’s not in our curriculum. We can’t really do that for you yet.’

At other schools, however, the lack of collegial support and the absence of feedback on their teaching resulted in professional isolation. This may explain Jane’s assertion that “my classroom is my private space”.

(ii) From Outside the School

Sources of support from outside the school include other Grade R teachers who belonged to the same cluster, departmental officials, training facilitators, professional associations and teacher trade unions. Significantly three of the four principals expressed the view that the support role of the Department of Education was inadequate and that increased funding was required for infrastructure. Site A and B’s principals stated that the needs of Grade R teachers and learners were unique such as child-size toilets and separate outdoor play areas and that compelled the department to make additional funding available. This was most strongly expressed by Site B’s principal and appropriately since it is a no-fee school. The participant teachers at Site D stated that they received limited support from the Department of Education and that departmental officials had not visited them.

Takalani: In June, we will be receiving our first visit in six years. They have previously told us that they will be visiting us but then they do not pitch.

However, Natasha noted that she received three departmental visits at her previous school and experienced it as “extremely stressful”. With the exception of Paige and Patricia (Site A), all the Grade R teachers attended cluster meetings which afforded them ongoing opportunities to network with other Grade R teachers. Those who utilised these opportunities noted that they found it beneficial, especially since it enabled them to obtain information regarding NCS implementation at other primary schools in their area.

Takalani, Natasha, Reinnette, Isabel and Jackie (Site D) stated that they regularly attended seminars organised by the Association for the Education and Care of Young Children (AECYC), a professional ECE body. The AECYC provided them with the opportunity to network with other preschools as well as ECE stakeholders such as higher education institutions who train ECE teachers and independent ECE consultants. The Grade R teachers at Site D also mentioned that they received ongoing professional advice on

Grade R policy and curriculum from the South African Teachers' Union, (SATU/SAOU)⁵³.

No other Grade R teachers mentioned that they received support from either professional associations or teacher trade unions.⁵⁴

Takalani: What we have found is that we are ahead of what is offered by the Department of Education. We often attend their training but we do not learn anything new. I think what is more meaningful is the training we receive from the SAOU and AECYC. We are affiliated to AECYC.

5.7.3 Internal Factors

In this section, I focus on how affective factors such as beliefs, motivation and job satisfaction, influenced the nine participants' responses to curriculum change. Successful implementation of the NCS requires teachers to possess the beliefs, understandings and intentions that will enable them to respond positively either by *adopting* or *adapting* the new curriculum.

5.7.3.1 Beliefs and Philosophy of Grade R Teachers

As noted in Chapter 2, teachers' beliefs influence their decision-making processes and actions (Collopy, 2003; Keys & Bryan, 2001; Wilcox-Hertzog & Ward, 2004). The participant teachers' beliefs relate to their philosophy of Grade R, which in turn shapes their beliefs about pedagogy.

The participant teachers were unanimous in their opinion that the Grade R curriculum should be accompanied by informal, sensory stimulation and experimentation with a rich variety of concrete apparatus. They noted that they believe that playful learning is the hallmark of the Grade R curriculum. All the participant teachers stated that learning should be informal and enjoyable. Several participants stated that learners' happiness and well-being was their priority. They also noted that other than school readiness, this was the parents' main concern.

⁵³ The South African Teachers' Union is mainly an Afrikaans-speaking organisation and is known mainly by its Afrikaans acronym, SAOU.

⁵⁴ In South Africa, preschool teachers have historically not been unionised because it is often difficult to determine who the employer is and also because of the large number of different employers. State employees have all have the same employer and are therefore easy to unionise.

Takalani: I think the most important thing that parents want is for their children to be happy. These children must wake up every morning with a smile and want to come to school. It must be fun for them to be here.

Jackie: Parents need to know that the building blocks for Grade 1 are being laid here so that they can carry on with formal work in Grade 1. Parents want their children to be loved, they need to develop in all the developmental domains, they want their children to be happy, to be allowed to play, and make friends and adjust well to school, and develop all the skills they will need in big school, especially the emotional aspect.

The participant teachers unanimously believe that the Department of Education should recognise them as professional teachers and that the status of their work should be elevated. They all regard themselves as committed to their work with young children.

The teachers were unanimous in the view that the daily programme should be designed to meet children's needs in a holistic and balanced manner. Although all the Grade R teachers stated that they have adopted the curriculum change, only the qualified teachers referred to the learning outcomes and the assessment standards for Grade R. The underqualified teachers referred mainly to the universal milestones of development for 5-year-olds. Prior to the introduction of the official curriculum, all ECE teachers used these milestones to design developmentally appropriate curricula for children. ECE teacher training programmes still place great emphasis on the universal milestones of development. However, the Grade R teachers participating in this study emphasised different developmental domains that they regard as essential for ensuring success at school. All the teachers believe that these domains should therefore be considered when *adapting* the new curriculum.

The participant teachers differed significantly regarding their beliefs on what children should learn during the Grade R year. In particular, they emphasised different content areas. For example, during my interview with Anna, she listed what she regards as important for Grade R learners to know prior to Grade 1. This included knowing colours, counting, identifying numbers, sorting objects, measuring, weighing, knowing their home language and an additional language and listening to stories. All these areas fall into the cognitive domain, and involve knowledge acquisition.

Patricia stated that she believes social skills, for example, playing with peers and sharing, are the most important thing that Grade R learners should learn. In addition, she believes that the Grade R programme should develop learners' gross and fine motor skills as well as their perceptual skills.

Natasha stressed that gross motor skills were the basis for the development of fine motor skills. According to Natasha, Grade R teachers must understand what knowledge and skills their learners will require in Grade 1. This view reinforces the importance of whole phase planning and may provide insight into the increasing emphasis on school readiness by the end of the Grade R year.

5.7.3.2 Motivation

Motivation to implement curriculum change is closely related to a teacher's personal interpretations and emotions regarding change (Sleegers *et al.*, 2002:90). Hargreaves (1998:89) observed that teachers commonly experience feelings of uncertainty and inadequacy because of curriculum change. Although these affective factors are related, I discuss the participant teachers' motivations and emotions separately.

All the participant teachers noted that their location at state primary schools and their increased access to professional development opportunities have motivated them to teach Grade R and implement the NCS. However, they acknowledged that the relatively better conditions of service of their Foundation Phase counterparts was motivating them to pursue further training and seek posts as Grade 1, 2 or 3 teachers.

Anna: I see myself remaining in Grade R as long as in Grade R. I have the Persal⁵⁵ number and the good salary. I enjoy the small kids. Therefore, I see myself remaining, even in the Foundation Phase because ECD covers birth to Grade 3.

All the participant teachers noted that their main motivation to implement the NCS was the compliance monitoring of the GDE. They also noted that they were motivated to remain in their state primary school setting because of their largely satisfactory working conditions. These teachers appeared to be positive, motivated and enthusiastic. They noted that training programmes had motivated them to implement the required curriculum change.

⁵⁵ Persal is the payroll system for state employed teachers.

Jackie: Yes, I think a teacher is more motivated. She feels as if she has learned something new. It is easy to get into a rut and stagnate if you are just in your classroom. Therefore, you need exposure, and you come back (from workshops) with new ideas and you are more motivated to teach.

However, they stated that they did not all feel positive about the NCS when it was first implemented. After attending training sessions and understanding the need for the change, they *adopted* the curriculum change.

Natasha: I think initially everyone was very negative. It's was a very big mind shift for everyone to be positive. A person feels that there are so many changes and a person works so hard at it but you do not see the results. It was a very big mind shift for the people and to get everyone around you positive and say, 'it's going to work', even though you yourself do not yet know if it will work. For the first period, we felt like headless chickens. It was completely out of our comfort zone.

Takalani, Natasha, Reinnette, Jackie, Isabel and Paige all mentioned that they were strongly motivated by parents' expectations and "demands".

Natasha: You know, the parents are very involved. I must tell you, at this school, they are almost over-involved, they have high expectations, some parents are demanding. I think it is because of the community where we are. They want things "my way". They will very quickly question, "Why have you done it like this and not like that?" Yes, but we are still not negative. If parents are involved it is actually a good thing, we do have a good relationship with our parents. Therefore, I think after years of experience a person learns how to handle it.

Jackie: This is a community where people are well educated and they want their children to be appropriately stimulated. They do have their own demands that they make. In addition, one should try to treat the child in the way that parents want them to be treated.

One influence on their motivation appeared to be their concern for maintaining the school's reputation. These participants were very cautious because they knew that if parents were dissatisfied with something, they would question the teachers' actions. This occurred most notably at Site D where the participant teachers as well as their principal repeatedly referred to the importance of "keeping children and their parents happy". Site D's teachers also made frequent references to the importance of protecting the school's reputation.

5.7.3.3 Job Satisfaction

The participant teachers were unanimous in the opinion that the introduction of the NCS in Grade R had raised the profile and status of preschool teachers. Although they still do not enjoy the same benefits as Foundation Phase teachers, their conditions of service have drastically improved compared to when they were teaching at community-based ECE centres. In particular, the Grade R teachers mentioned that their salaries and vacation leave had increased while their working hours decreased.⁵⁶

With the exception of the Grade R teachers at Site D, who were not required to participate in any extra-curricular activities, the Grade R teachers noted that their involvement in extra-curricular activities had enhanced their job satisfaction. This was attributed to the fact that it helped them to feel “more a part of the staff”, since they were often involved in extra-curricular activities with teachers from other grades.

While Jane is responsible for her learners’ after school care, she receives additional remuneration and therefore this additional responsibility does not detract from her job satisfaction. Rather, she pointed out that it was the animosity between herself and her Foundation Phase colleagues that undermined her job satisfaction, as discussed in section 5.5.3.

The participant teachers at Site D noted that teaching in an aesthetically appealing, well-resourced context has positively affected their job satisfaction levels. Isabel summed this sentiment up well by stating, “I could not believe my luck when I got this post.” In general, all five teachers made statements such as, “We are lucky to work here”, “We have everything we need” and “Everybody who comes here says they also want to work here”.

Takalani noted that parents could negatively affect teachers’ levels of job satisfaction. When asked if she experienced any challenges regarding demands from parents, she stated,

Takalani: Yes definitely. We are in an area where parents have a strong academic background. Many of our parents have doctorates. In fact, sometimes they look down on us as teachers; they do not think we have the necessary qualifications... They think that because they pay higher fees they can decide what happens in the school. Therefore, very often we get difficult parents who

⁵⁶ The working day at community-based ECE centres is much longer in duration than that of state primary schools.

are condescending and tell us, ‘you are just a teacher, who do you think you are?’ and do you know how important they [the parents] are?

All the Grade R teachers who participated in this study were unanimous in the opinion that parents “are more demanding” and “want a guarantee that their children will be ready for Grade 1”. In addition, all the Grade R teachers noted that parents demanded that they teach their children to read and write during the Grade R year. With the exception of Site D, all the Grade R teachers noted that parents demanded that their children are taught English.

The participant teachers at Site D argued that they are deeply aware of the need to constantly review and improve their instructional practice. This relates to their consistent references to the school’s reputation, their need to satisfy parents’ demands and their need to ensure that by the end of the Grade R year, the children are ready for formal learning. They are also motivated to ensure that their Grade R learners remain at the school and proceed to Grade 1 and onwards. The teachers see themselves as proactive in relation to dealing with parents. Their experiences have taught them that parents will demand formal instruction for their children and therefore they arrange a meeting with the parents within the first two weeks of the school year to explain what the Grade R programme entails.

Paige, Patricia, Anna and Jane said that they either *ignore* or *resist* these parental demands, while Takalani, Natasha, Reinnette, Isabel and Jackie respond to the demands by convincing parents why formal instruction should not be included in the Grade R programme.

All the participant teachers in this study agreed that parental demands, specifically for formal academic tasks and rote learning, had increased since the introduction of the NCS in Grade R. Takalani, Natasha, Reinnette, Isabel and Jackie pointed out that they found parents “very demanding” and noted that the more educated parents were, the more likely they were to challenge assessment reports. This significantly detracted from the teachers’ job satisfaction.

5.7.4 Summary of Findings Related to Factors influencing ECE Teachers' Responses to Curriculum Change

The findings of this study confirm that Grade R teachers' access to professional development, resources and support influenced their responses to curriculum change. Furthermore, despite being critical of the implementation of the NCS in Grade R because they believed that it was developmentally inappropriate, they acknowledged that their relocation to state schools had increased their job satisfaction and motivation.

5.8 Synopsis of Findings

With one exception, the teachers who participated in this study all had at least 10 years' teaching experience. One group of underqualified participant teachers viewed the NCS as developmentally inappropriate for five-year-old learners because it has resulted in rigid, formal academic learning at the expense of playful learning. Another group of underqualified participant teachers *adapted* the curriculum in such a way that their classrooms strongly resembled their Grade 1 colleagues' classrooms. The qualified participant teachers *adapted* their classroom practices to accommodate more formal activities and claimed that they had always been doing outcomes based education.

The participant teachers articulated the belief that Grade R differs significantly from the rest of the Foundation Phase. The qualified teachers argued that Grade R should be part of a seamless continuum of development from pre-reception year programmes and that its main purpose should be to facilitate learners' gradual transition into the Foundation Phase and structured learning.

Although the mounting pressure to ensure school readiness was stressful for the participant teachers, they have embraced their relocation to state schools. They have all had increased access to professional development opportunities and resources.

The main unintended consequence of professional development programmes is that Grade R teachers may not remain in their current posts, since they plan to pursue Foundation Phase posts in the future. The current funding formula acts against the retention of qualified Grade R teachers in Grade R classrooms. Teachers' success in professional development has boosted their confidence to embark on further training.

Historical inequalities are being reinforced in Grade R programmes. The well resourced schools enjoyed teacher:learner ratios as low as 1:17 and abundant resources, while the

no-fee school had a ratio of 1:46 and was inadequately resourced. State schools do not rely exclusively on parents to pay fees, but instead they raise funds aggressively from the private sector.

The Grade R teachers who participated in this study regarded themselves as knowledgeable about preschool education. Instead of referring to the learning outcomes and assessment standards of the NCS, they constantly referred to the universal milestones of development and where typically developing Grade R learners should be in relation to each domain. They did not regard their principals, heads of departments or departmental officials as knowledgeable of Grade R and therefore did not seek instructional leadership from them. Instead, the Foundation Phase heads of department provided instructional leadership to Grade R teachers. If they regard the Grade R teachers as knowledgeable and experienced, they give them autonomy in curriculum implementation. However, if the HoD does not regard the Grade R teacher as knowledgeable and experienced, the HoD's own Foundation Phase orientation leads to an emphasis on formal school readiness.

While the participant teachers in this study had all complied with the planning requirements of the NCS, there was little evidence of the NCS in their lesson presentations. The current approach to teacher accountability appeared to reinforce superficial compliance with curriculum change and education policies. For example, the teachers used the NCS to report assessment results even if they did not actually follow the guidelines during the assessment process.