

# Chapter 1: From the Margins of Education: Curriculum Change in Early Childhood Education

## 1.1 Background to the Study

This study investigates Early Childhood Education (ECE) teachers' responses to curriculum change. ECE ranks among the most fragmented and marginalised sectors of education in many countries (Kamerman 2005; UNESCO 2007) including South Africa (ETDP SETA 2001). Since 1994, the entire South African education system has been in a process of transformation which has begun to shift ECE from the margins of education to the mainstream. In particular, the introduction of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF 1995) with its related bands<sup>1</sup> confirmed the importance of ECE as it was first proposed by the National Education Policy Investigation (NEPI 1992).

Because of these national policy processes, ECE has been recognised as a fundamental pillar for lifelong learning. This policy was concretised in 2001 with the introduction of White Paper 5 on Early Childhood Development (National Department of Education 2001) that announced that a Reception Year (Grade R) would gradually be phased in. In addition, the Report on the Nationwide Audit of ECD Provisioning<sup>2</sup> (2001) noted that the overwhelming majority of ECE teachers are inadequately trained.

In this research study, I define early childhood as policies and programmes for children from birth to five years of age. My focus is on teachers working with children younger than the age prescribed for Grade 1. There is no consistent definition of "early childhood education" in South Africa. The National Department of Education defines ECE as policies and programmes for children from birth to nine years of age. However, the National Departments of Social Development and Health defines it as policies and programmes for children from birth to five.

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<sup>1</sup> The bands are Adult Education and Training, Schooling (Early Childhood Development, Intermediate Phase, Senior Phase), Further Education and Training, and Higher Education and Training.

<sup>2</sup> ECE (Early Childhood Education) is the internationally accepted term, while ECD (Early Childhood Development) is the term most widely used in South Africa. These concepts overlap widely. For the purpose of this thesis, I will use ECE (except in direct quotations and the titles of documents), with the understanding that it deals mainly with the educational aspect of ECD.

## 1.2 Introduction

Although change occurs rapidly in all spheres of life, change in education often receives more attention than any other sector (Apple 2001:1). Worldwide, schools are expected to respond to globalization, national reconstruction and economic growth. However, curriculum change literature produced over nearly a century, contains no evidence of such possibilities (Jansen 1999:148). Regardless of this lack of research into curriculum change, teachers are continually charged with the responsibility of economic regeneration and expected to develop capacity for innovation, flexibility and commitment to change (Fullan 1993:18; Hargreaves 1994:5). Moreover, there appears to be consensus that teachers are the key to educational change and school improvement (Buddin & Zamarro 2008:1; Hargreaves 2003:1; Penuel, Fishman, Yamaguchi & Gallagher 2007:921). Ballet, Kelchtermans and Loughran (2006:209) argue that such demands on teachers constitute significant extensions to their teaching role and detract from the core activity of teaching. Public concern for learners' academic development in order to enhance nations' technological and economic advancement underpins the growth of ECE programmes as well as the use of formal instruction as an extension of the primary grades (Fromberg 2006:69). Consequently, the ECE field has undergone a period of intense change in recent years (Ryan 2004:663).

Teachers, as the drivers of change, therefore deserve new respect and careful consideration, particularly since curriculum change is often accompanied by unrealistic demands, a lack of time and resources to understand the content of the required change, inadequate training, increased workload and a lack of effective management (Jansen 1999:152; Priestley & Sime 2005:489). Policy makers, education officials, politicians, the media, parents and the public exert intense pressure on teachers. Furthermore, professional development programmes seldom give teachers adequate tools to enable them to cope with change (Hargreaves 2003). As a result, curriculum change, although intended to increase the effectiveness of teachers, has the converse effect when teachers tend to avoid the challenge of change (Richardson & Placier 2001:905). Curriculum change may even undermine teachers and their capacity to implement change effectively.

Curriculum change in post-apartheid South Africa has been drastic because an urgent alternative to apartheid schooling was required (Jansen, in Jansen & Christie 1999:145). Consequently, Outcomes Based Education (OBE) was introduced in 1997. In 2001, the Department of Education commenced the phased-in implementation of Grade R

programmes. The application of OBE to these programmes in 2004 meant that they became part of the formal schooling system. The majority of reception year programmes have gradually been relocated to state primary schools ahead of 2014, the year planned for full-scale implementation of the Grade R curriculum.

Over the past two decades, many governments have recognised the benefits of ECE programmes (Gillian & Zigler 2000:441-443; World Bank 2004:2). This has led to the integration of ECE into the school system and the adoption of official ECE curricula (Ebbeck & Waniganayake 2003; Frost 2007; Gammage 2006; Lobman & Ryan 2007). Historically in terms of South African ECE programmes, there has been a distinction between informal preschool (birth to five) and formal primary school (Grades 1 to 3). The informal, “emergent curriculum” was play-based, learner-centred, flexible, integrated all developmental domains, and promoted the active involvement of the young child (Faber & Van Staden 1997:15). Integrated or holistic development includes intellectual (language, learning skills, creativity, basic concepts), emotional (positive self image, control over emotions, self confidence), social and moral (relationships, acceptable communication skills, norms and values, respect for others), physical (health and strong body, physical independence, perceptual and motor skills, control over body) (Faber & Van Staden 1997:2).

In the absence of official curricula, teachers have followed the broad principles of developmentally appropriate practice (DAP) (Cassidy, Mims, Rucker & Boone 2003:195) and the universal milestones of development (Gordon & Browne 2008:430; Morrison 2006:55) when planning their daily programmes. The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC 1997:10) defines DAP as an approach to education that guides teachers in their everyday practice. Applied to ECE, DAP supports experiential, play-based curricula with effective opportunities for individualised learning, parental involvement and positive transitions to school (Anderson 2003:5). However, being able to apply this approach requires well-trained ECE teachers who possess a sophisticated level of knowledge and skills.

Despite the teachers’ lack of capacity, the National Department of Education introduced the official curriculum, the National Curriculum Statement (NCS), into Grade R classes in 2004. When the reception year was introduced, the majority of classes were located in community-based ECE centres. These existing classes have now largely been relocated to state primary schools and additional school-based classes have been established. Prior

to 2004, there was no official curriculum for Grade R. Instead, teachers designed their own curricula. The NCS, by its very imposition, is an example of radical curriculum change. My study reports on an investigation into how ECE teachers in Gauteng, South Africa are responding to this curriculum change.

In South Africa, Grade R programmes and the official curriculum are being implemented simultaneously. We therefore do not know what the value of traditional ECE approaches might have been if there was universal access to Grade R programmes in South Africa, since this was a policy choice that was never made. What we do know is that despite the majority of Grade R teachers being underqualified, they are still expected to implement a sophisticated curriculum. Grade R teachers have significantly lower qualifications than their counterparts in primary and secondary classrooms. Nevertheless, they are required to implement the same curriculum.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, teachers are doing so within tight fiscal constraints which may influence their responses. The Institute for Democracy in Africa (IDASA 2004:1) has referred to ECE as “the Cinderella of education”, noting that funding remains inadequate.

Despite the teachers’ lack of capacity, the National Department of Education introduced the official curriculum, the National Curriculum Statement (NCS), into Grade R classes in 2004. When the reception year was introduced, the majority of classes were located in community-based ECE centres. These existing classes have now largely been relocated to state primary schools and additional school-based classes have been established. Prior to 2004, there was no official curriculum for Grade R. Instead, teachers designed their own curricula. The NCS, by its very imposition, is an example of radical curriculum change. My study reports on an investigation into how ECE teachers in Gauteng, South Africa are responding to this curriculum change.

To summarize, the South African Government has introduced a year-long preschool programme, Grade R, as part of the Foundation Phase of primary schooling. Since 2004, Grade R teachers, who are mostly underqualified and have inadequate resources, have been compelled to implement the official curriculum.<sup>4</sup> Prior to this, there was no official curriculum and teachers created their own curriculum based on the universal milestones of

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<sup>3</sup> By 2013, all teachers in primary and secondary classrooms must meet the requirements of the Norms and Standards for Educators (1998) namely REQV 14, which is the equivalent of a B. Ed. degree or Grade 12 plus 4 years of teacher training. This does not apply to Grade R teachers, for whom the minimum qualification is NQF Level 5 or Higher Certificate in Grade R (Department of Higher Education (2010)

<sup>4</sup> See Appendix 1: Circular 28/2005 Implementation of Grade R in Gauteng.

development. My study investigates how Grade R teachers are responding to this curriculum change.

### **1.3 Problem Statement**

The official curriculum prescribes learning outcomes and assessment standards for learning and teaching in Grade R (National Department of Education 2003). Goldstein (2006:2) and Kwon (2002:11) are in accord that governments are introducing mandated or official curricula in ECE in many countries. Standards prescribed by mandated curricula allow for measuring quality and accountability (Stoney, Mitchell & Warner 2006:102). Standards originated in the USA in the 1920s, when education reform followed business models, and focused on the specifications of outcomes in the form of behavioural objectives (Tuxworth 1989:10).

Love (2006:15), argues that the benefits of ECE standards include: (i) programme improvement, (ii) positive curriculum change, (iii) enhanced professional development, (iv) more effective resource allocation, (v) monitoring trends over time, and (vi) enhanced support for ECE programmes. Policy makers in general therefore regard results-based accountability as an essential part of a larger strategy to improve outcomes for children (Friedman 2004:14; Love 2006:21). Although unintended, excessive emphasis is placed on “measuring children’s end-of-programme status” (Love 2006:16). Other “unintended consequences” are the adoption of formal approaches to teaching and assessment, and rote learning tasks which are developmentally inappropriate (Anderson 2003:5; Blaustein 2005:5; Neuman 2007:2; Osgood 2006; Scott-Little, Kagan & Frelow 2003:1).

According to the National Norms and Standards for Grade R Funding, Government Gazette No. 30679 (Republic of South Africa 2008) the funding for Grade R classes will increase incrementally until it reaches 70% of the current per learner expenditure for a Grade 1 learner per year (National Department of Education, 2008). However, even ECE centres that receive all the available subsidies, still struggle financially (Phatudi, Joubert & Botha 2007), since official subsidies are inadequate to sustain centres of good practice for children of unemployed or low wage-earning parents. Furthermore, the human resource capacity required to support, monitor and assure the quality of ECE programmes is variable and in many provinces, inadequate (DBSA 2007). Many ECE teachers therefore

have limited capacity<sup>5</sup> to implement the official curriculum. Bailey (2000:116) notes that the disjuncture between policy assumptions and teachers' classroom realities can marginalize teachers, especially if it fails to take their working conditions or their core values into consideration. Despite the recognised benefits of ECD standards, teachers experience many challenges in implementing them in their classrooms.

## 1.4 Rationale for the Study

The extent to which teachers are able to implement the official curriculum successfully is unknown. Terwel (2005:660) argues that meaningful curriculum change requires new skills, behaviours and beliefs. Ota, Dicarlo, Burts, Laird and Gioe (2006:159), recommend that further research should examine the long-term effects of behaviour change related to teacher training. A more comprehensive list of further research requirements in developing countries is given by Montero-Sieburth (1992:191-192). This list includes understanding the context of curriculum change, analysis of underlying assumptions of curriculum delivery, the use and availability of instructional materials, curriculum implementation and evaluation. Unfortunately, to a large extent, Montero-Sieburth's (1992) recommendations remain unsatisfied today.

Studies have found that policy makers pay insufficient attention to the context of change (Bell & Stevenson 2004; Chisholm 2005; Penn 2000). Similarly, Hargreaves (2005) and Jansen (1998) note that change often fails because it disregards the realities of classroom life. Developing countries rely too heavily on imported curriculum change or "policy borrowing" (Jambunathan & Caulfield 2008; Jansen 1999). However, innovations cannot necessarily be easily or successfully transferred from one context to another.

Analyses of the underlying assumptions of curriculum delivery have indeed been abstract. An exaggerated emphasis on quantity has been prevalent (Montero-Sieburth 1992), especially in developing countries, but a qualitative approach to curriculum is needed since it has the advantage of reaching beyond the curriculum itself to investigate contextual features. Although ECE research is increasingly being undertaken in South Africa, there is still little focus on teachers' perspectives of curriculum change. Recent studies include: (i) Botha, Maree and De Witt's (2005) study on Grade R teachers' implementation of the numeracy learning programme; (ii) Phatudi's (2007) study on

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<sup>5</sup> McLaughlin (1987) notes that teacher capacity relates to teachers' access to professional development opportunities, support and resources.

children's transitions from home and pre-school contexts to primary school, with curriculum change as a secondary focus; (iii) the National Treasury (2008) study on the readiness of the South African education system to implement universal access to Grade R; (iv) the Gauteng Department of Education and Wits School of Education (2009) study that examines the implementation of the NCS in the Foundation Phase; (v) the Eastern Cape Department of Education (2010) study that examines the status and implementation of Grade R in the province; and (vi) the SAIDE (2010) study that examines the readiness of children, teachers and the system to implement Grade R classrooms. These studies examine mainly external factors, and none of them focus specifically on internal factors that influence ECE teachers' responses to curriculum change.

My study will attempt to fill this gap in the available body of research by focusing specifically on ECE teachers' responses to curriculum change. I focus mainly on underqualified Grade R teachers, although qualified teachers are included. ECE teachers hold a range of qualifications but most are lower than a bachelor's degree, which is the minimum qualification for teachers in South Africa, as in the majority of other countries. In Sub-Saharan Africa, only 7% of ECE teachers are qualified (Kamerma 2005; Walle 2006), which is a common occurrence in developing contexts. Penn (2000:3) notes that these contexts constitute the "majority world countries" since they are home to 75% of the world's children.

The Phatudi (2007) and Botha *et al.* (2005) studies mentioned above focus mainly on qualified teachers at relatively well-resourced institutions since these schools fall under the auspices of education departments and receive departmental subsidies. There is therefore a need to extend such research to investigate how underqualified Grade R teachers are responding to curriculum change. My study extends the current body of scientific knowledge by examining the interrelationship between teachers' contexts and their characteristics, both at a personal and professional level, and how these factors influence their responses to curriculum change. Lobman and Ryan (2007:368) note that despite a growing consensus among researchers and policy advisers about the prerequisite knowledge and skills required by preschool teachers, little is known about the views of those on the front line of ECE—the teachers themselves.

My personal motivation for undertaking this study relates to my working experience, starting as a Grade R teacher from 1994 to 1998. From 2000 to 2002, I was a member of the Foundation Phase working group, one of the groups involved in writing the National

Curriculum Statement (NCS). Although I did not implement the NCS in my Grade R class, I have presented teacher training on the topic since 2002. I have also become aware that Grade R teachers have limited capacity to implement the required changes due to their limited formal qualifications and access to further training, as well as the low levels of resourcing of the ECE sector as a whole. This awareness emerges from previous research I conducted as part of my Masters in Education studies (2005), for the Development Bank of Southern Africa (2007), and my involvement with national ECE non-governmental organisations (NGOs). My Masters study found that pre-reception year teachers were using formal approaches and teaching literacy skills for which children were not ready. They lacked the conceptual understanding of pre-literacy skills. The DBSA study found that teachers in unregistered centres were poorly trained and that their classrooms were very poorly resourced.

Over the past four years, anecdotal evidence from practice teaching experiences of Bachelor in Education (B.Ed.) and Post Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) students that I mentored at the University of Pretoria, suggested that many ECE teachers are using formal activities extensively in Grade R classrooms. The use of worksheets to teach children to read and write is especially prominent. Many studies, such as those conducted by Blaustein (2006), Ethridge and King (2005), Goldstein (2006), Grisham-Brown, Hallam and Brookshire (2006), Hirsh-Pasek, Golinkoff, Berk and Singer (2009), Phatudi (2007) and Sestini (2000) have since found worksheets to be prevalent in ECE classrooms. Each of these authors argues that such materials are developmentally inappropriate in the ECE context, since teachers are focusing very narrowly on standards at the expense of learning through play. In addition, they found empirical evidence that teachers are focused on producing evidence of learning.

It should be noted that nowhere in the NCS is there any recommendation to use worksheets, and that no studies suggest that this constitutes best practice. Despite this, there are numerous examples of learning and teaching resource materials endorsed by the National Department of Education that contain extensive worksheets. Walsh, Sproule, McGuinness, Trew, Rafferty & Sheehy (2006:203) argue that ECE curricula in many countries focus “too heavily and too early on academic achievement, detracting from the enjoyment of learning, lacking relevance and coherence for everyday life”. Such findings are echoed by Geist and Baum (2005:2), and Ethridge and King (2005:294). Accordingly, one aspect of this study will be to examine how Grade R teachers plan their lessons.



## 1.5 Research Question

The following research question and sub-questions guided this inquiry:

How do teachers respond to the introduction of the official curriculum at reception year level?

### Research Sub-Questions

- (i) How do Grade R teachers plan their lessons?
- (ii) Which classroom practices do Grade R teachers employ?
- (iii) What informs Grade R teachers' responses to curriculum change?

## 1.6 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore Grade R teachers' responses to curriculum change. Since the official curriculum requires detailed lesson planning and much emphasis is placed on this requirement by the Department of Education, I specifically considered how Grade R teachers plan their lessons as well as the extent to which they implemented the curriculum change by observing their classroom practices. In addition, I examined the external factors (professional development, resources and support) and the internal factors (beliefs, motivation and job satisfaction) that influence Grade R teachers' responses to curriculum change (McLaughlin 1987). Although external factors feature prominently in the literature on teachers' responses to curriculum change, very limited studies have focused on internal factors in developing countries, and no studies have done so in South Africa.

## 1.7 Significance of the Study

Although the literature on teachers' responses to curriculum change is substantial, very limited research has been undertaken to illuminate how ECE teachers respond to curriculum change and how the implementation of the official curriculum might influence their instructional decisions and classroom practice. During the past decade, a large number of studies have been conducted on official ECE curricula in developed countries (Ballet, Kelchtermans & Loughran 2006; Fromberg 2006; Goldstein 2006; Hirsh-Pasek, Golinkoff, Berk & Singer 2009; Ryan 2004; Ryan & Ackerman 2005; Scott-Little *et al.* 2006; Smylie & Perry 2005; Oberhuemer 2005; Wilson & Lowenberg-Ball 2006). However, very few studies have focused on ECE teachers' responses to curriculum change in developing countries.

My study therefore illuminates how Grade R teachers in two cities in South Africa are responding to curriculum change. In particular, I examine early childhood policy and curriculum change through the perspectives and classroom practices of Grade R teachers. The official curriculum requires Grade R teachers to implement a prescriptive approach to lesson planning, assessment and outcome setting. This contrasts with their former practices of designing their own curriculum.

My study may contribute to policy and practice in South Africa, since government involvement in ECE is a relatively recent development. This will however expand greatly since the National Department of Education plans to implement universal access to Grade R by 2014.

The main ECD policy priority in this White Paper is the establishment of a national system of provision of the Reception Year for children aged 5 years that combines a large public and smaller independent component. In this regard, our medium term goal is for all children entering Grade 1 to have participated in an accredited Reception Year Programme (National Department of Education 2001a:5).

Furthermore, since the National Department of Education (2009) has developed standards for pre-reception year programmes contained in the National Early Learning and Development Standards (NELDS), my study will illuminate ECE teachers' responses to the official curriculum and what they need to support them to do so effectively. It is imperative that research informs future policy development. In the case of South Africa, the state has relied heavily on research conducted elsewhere in formulating its ECE policy. Issues of importance include how teachers respond to the introduction of the official curriculum at reception year level, how Grade R teachers plan their lessons, which classroom practices Grade R teachers employ and what informs Grade R teachers' responses to curriculum change, which shaped my research questions.

My study will also have benefits for pedagogical practice since I am professionally engaged in training Grade R teachers. I share Collins and O'Brien's (2003:93) view that the curriculum reflects a society's requirements to prepare future generations for adaptability, acceptance, diversity and survival in an unknown world.

## 1.8 The Scope and Context of the Study

The National Department of Education (2001a) defines early childhood development (ECD) as an umbrella term for the process through which children grow and thrive physically, mentally, emotionally, morally and socially, from birth to at least nine years of age. Participation in an accredited preschool Reception Year Programme for five-year old children will become compulsory for all learners entering Grade 1 by 2010 (National Department of Education 2008a:4). Since 2001, Grade R has been gradually phased in to become part of public provision, in particular, part of primary education. The policy target is that by 2010, all five to six-year-old children should have access to Grade R, mostly in the public sector (National Department of Education 2001a). Following the findings of a 2008 study conducted by National Treasury that provinces lacked the capacity to fully implement Grade R, President Jacob Zuma, in his State of the Nation address on 3 June 2009 noted that “the Early Childhood Development programme will be stepped up, with the aim of ensuring universal access to Grade R... by 2014”.

Access to Grade R has expanded drastically (National Department of Education 2008a:5). Between 1999 and 2007, Grade R enrolment in schools increased by 212%, from 156 292 learners in 1999 to 487 525 in 2007. The increase in Grade R enrolment means that the Gross Enrolment Rate (GER) in Grade R increased from 15% in 1999 to 49% in 2007. These figures exclude Grade R learners enrolled in less formal ECE sites; thus the actual GER may be higher. The 2006 General Household Survey (Statistics South Africa 2006), reported that the number of five-year-old children with access to ECE programmes increased by 65 percentage points, from 387 000 in 2002 to 636 903 in 2006. These figures include the participation of five-year-olds in both school-based and community-based programmes.

Biersteker (2007) argues that it remains unclear whether Grade R is part of schooling, or just part of the school curriculum. Grade R teachers for example, are not part of the educator brigade, and Grade R learners do not have access to the nutrition programme. Grade R is therefore not really part of the formal school environment. In addition, there are unsafe and inadequate Grade R classes. Significantly, teachers do not know how to implement the curriculum. Despite these constraints, it remains a huge achievement that access to Grade R is increasing so rapidly (Biersteker 2007).



## 1.9 Delimiting the Study

I employed a case study design to illuminate (describe, explain and explore) the phenomenon of how Grade R teachers respond to the implementation of the official curriculum (Hancock & Algozzine 2006:15; Schwandt, 2007:28). Nieuwenhuis (2007:75) notes that case studies offer multiple perspective analysis of participants as well as accommodating the views of other relevant groups and the interaction between them. While case studies are not generalisable in the strict statistical sense, they offer more depth and insight than quantitative studies.

Moreover, I was cognisant that the gender dynamics of the ECE sector has significantly affected ECE policy because women's voices are relatively weak in the policy process as noted by Porteus (2004:349). I therefore also found the case study design useful to give "a voice to the powerless and voiceless" (Nieuwenhuis 2007:75).

My case selection focused on nine Grade R teachers in their natural contexts, bounded by time and activity (Creswell 2003:15). All nine teachers are located in state school-based ECE programmes in Johannesburg and Pretoria. I selected them from a list of schools which I had obtained from the Gauteng Department of Education. The data that were collected were subjected to a thematic analysis across cases (cross-case analysis) (Creswell 2003:15). In the final interpretive phase, I report on how these nine teachers have responded to curriculum change. Yin's (2003:4) observation that case studies are useful when the phenomenon under study is not readily distinguishable from its context is relevant to the ECE sector. With a single exception, the teachers have a minimum of ten years' teaching experience, meaning that they have at least 5 years' experience implementing the broad principles of DAP. Therefore, since 2009 was the fifth year of the implementation of the NCS in Grade R classes (the introduction of the mandated curriculum), and these teachers started their careers before that, they have experience of implementing (or not implementing) the new curriculum.

I applied qualitative research methods to understand the social context within which ECE teachers' practices occur (Smith & Shepard 1988:310), framed within an interpretive paradigm. My aim was to understand the subjective world of human experience (Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2000:22), namely how teachers respond to curriculum change. I therefore focused on teachers' perspectives in order to understand their interpretations of the world around them (Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2000:22). This enabled me to "enter

the world of [the] participants and, at least for a time, see life through their eyes” (Rager 2005:24).

But any chosen method brings its limitations as well as its advantages. My study was limited to nine Grade R teacher cases in four state primary schools in two cities. The fieldwork for the study was conducted between January and August 2009. During this time several changes occurred as district departmental officials became increasingly involved in monitoring compliance.

## **1.10 Literature Review**

The literature reviewed in Chapters 2 and 3 demonstrates that although extensive research has been conducted on ECE teachers’ responses to curriculum change, this is largely in the context of developed countries. The literature review presents a synthesis of and critical engagement with existing empirical research, recommendations for further research, and silences or gaps in previous studies on factors that influence ECE teachers’ responses to curriculum change. I specifically focused on how teachers plan their lesson and the changes, if any, they make to their classroom practices. McLaughlin’s (1987) study on the external factors (professional development, resources, support) and the internal factors (beliefs, motivation and job satisfaction) that influence how teachers respond to curriculum change is used to organise the body of literature. While external factors can be addressed, for example, training can be provided, internal factors that underlie an implementer’s response are less amenable to policy intervention (McLaughlin 1987:172). My conceptual framework developed from the literature review illustrates how ECE teachers respond to curriculum change, and is presented in detail in Chapter 3.

## **1.11 Political and Ethical Considerations**

Universal access to Grade R is the policy target of the ECE sector in South Africa (National Department of Education 2001). With the introduction of the official curriculum, the NCS, Grade R became part of the Foundation Phase of schooling. However, the majority of Grade R posts are still located at community-based ECE centres. Grade R teachers are employed by school governing bodies rather than by the Department of Education, which implies that there are many issues regarding equity. The ECE sector is very poorly resourced, teachers are paid low salaries, and there is great inequality in the sector.

The ECE field in South Africa has historically been divided into “formal” and “non-formal” sectors, where formal suggests provisioning of higher quality than non-formal. There is significant ambiguity and tension surrounding these issues. As a PhD student and former university lecturer I am strongly associated with the formal sector. This necessitated sensitivity on my part in dealing with my research participants.

I obtained ethical clearance from the University of Pretoria’s Faculty of Education Ethics Committee prior to data collection. See Appendix 7 for the Ethics Clearance Certificate

### **1.11.1 Informed Consent**

I obtained informed consent from participants by (a) explaining the purpose of the study, (b) explaining that participation is voluntary, and (c) assuring them that they could withdraw at any time if they chose to do so. I requested participants to sign letters of consent prior to commencing data collection. I avoided potential risks to participants by ensuring that my methods were free of any form of deceit, duress, unfair inducement or manipulation (Berg 2001:56).

### **1.11.2 Privacy, Anonymity and Confidentiality**

Throughout my study, I remained cognisant of the need to demonstrate the appropriate sensitivity and awareness of the context in which ECE programmes operate. I used preferred pseudonyms when reporting data and the real names of my participants are never mentioned. I have been extremely cautious in how I discuss participants and their respective settings (Berg 2001:58).

I protected participants from harm by ensuring their privacy and confidentiality (Denzin & Lincoln 2000:139). The names of participants and schools have not been mentioned. I took special care to ensure that my “thick descriptions” did not compromise privacy and confidentiality.

## **1.12 The Role of the Researcher**

My approach to the study was informed by the literature on qualitative case studies set in the interpretive paradigm. I am a former Grade R teacher and although I have not implemented the official curriculum, the National Curriculum Statement, in my own Grade R classroom, I have presented training on it since 2002. In this study, I aim to present teachers’ perspectives of curriculum change in the field of ECE. I personally believe that a

sound understanding of children's development remains the hallmark of successful early learning and teaching.

## **1.13 Layout of the Study**

### *Chapter 1: Orientation*

This chapter provides a general introduction by describing the background to the study. I further discuss the purpose and rationale of the study, as well as my objectives. I identify my research questions and suggest the possible significance of the study for policy and practice. My research methods and design are introduced as well as the delimitations of the study.

### *Chapter 2: Literature Review*

This chapter contains my overview of the available literature and places the problem in a broader context. I present an overview of the ECE sector and the context within which teachers work. I describe what the main curriculum changes are that teachers are required to implement and how they respond to these changes. I further discuss how teachers plan their lessons and how they implement the curriculum change. Thereafter, I discuss two broad groups of factors that influence teachers' responses to curriculum change, namely external and internal factors. The external factors include professional development, resources and support. Internal factors relate to teachers' beliefs, motivation and job satisfaction, as well as their emotions.

### *Chapter 3: Conceptual Framework*

This chapter contains an explanation of the conceptual framework in which this study unfolded, and demonstrates how it was derived from a review of the (mainly international) literature on curriculum change. In terms of my conceptual framework, teacher agency determines how individual teachers respond to curriculum change. In particular, teachers may respond by (i) *ignoring*, (ii) *resisting*, (iii) *adopting*, or (iv) *adapting* curriculum change.

### *Chapter 4: Research Methodology and Research Design*

In this chapter, I describe the research design, methods, approach, data collection and analysis procedures, and strategies to ensure validity. I also discuss the ethical and political considerations that guided this case study.

*Chapter 5: Findings: Presentation and Discussion*

Chapter 5 contains the findings of the study based on a detailed presentation and discussion of the research data, compared to the literature review and conceptual framework.

*Chapter 6: Conclusions and Recommendations*

In this chapter, I present a synthesis of the foregoing chapters, reflect on my research design and methodology, revisit my data, draw conclusions based on my findings and discuss the implications of ECE teachers' responses to curriculum change. I also make recommendations / suggest implications of my study for policy, practice and future research.