

**“Things Are Always Changing”:
Investigating
Tasmanian Early Childhood Teachers’
Perceptions of Teaching**

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Declaration

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for a degree or diploma by the University or any other institution, except by way of background information and duly acknowledged in the thesis, and to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text.

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Statement of Ethical Conduct

The research associated with this thesis abides by the international and Australian codes on human and animal experimentation, the guidelines by the Australian Government's Office of the Gene Technology Regulator and the rulings of the Safety, Ethics and Institutional Biosafety Committees of the University.

Helen Fay Yost

Abstract

World-wide societal, economic, and technological changes, as well as government policy and educational reforms, have transformed Australian education. The effects of these changes have impacted upon school-community relationships, school organisation, curricula and, importantly, teachers and their work. In this rapidly changing world all levels of education, including the early years, have been affected. In this context, it was deemed appropriate to investigate EC teachers' perceptions of teaching in contemporary Tasmanian classrooms.

Since the 1960s, innovative programmes such as Head Start (USA), Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE) Project (UK) and, in Australia, the National Early Years Workforce Strategy have contributed to an increased awareness of the significance of education in the early years. This has been reflected in the range and quality of literature reporting on aspects of ECE. These aspects have included topics such as: student development, learning, pedagogical practices, and teacher-related issues. A review of the literature revealed that, in contrast to studies related to secondary and primary teachers' work lives, literature relating to early years' teachers' work lives was limited. A study to examine Tasmanian EC teachers' perceptions of teaching was seen as important in relation to addressing a gap in the literature, and as well informing policy makers and employers as they seek to address issues arising in the frequently changing national and international educational contexts.

The study was conducted in two stages and used a questionnaire and focus group interviews to generate data. Stage One involved the distribution of questionnaires to EC teachers (n=165) who had consented to participate in the study working in the Northern, North-Western and Southern regions of Tasmania. Following questionnaire returns (n=65), initial data analysis was completed. In Stage Two, focus group interviews (n=6) were conducted with self-nominating ECE teachers (n=15). In terms of demographic data, questionnaire participants were mostly female (96.9%) who reported that they held an EC teaching qualification, and had greater than 16 years teaching experience. Moreover, 83.4% of interviewees (n=12) had between 18 and 31 years teaching experience.

Almost all (98.5%) of these highly experienced EC teachers reported that they were intrinsically motivated to help students to learn. Yet, they also reported being challenged by issues which the teachers perceived were outside their control. Respondents cited changing family structures, greater student diversity, the integration of “included” students, resources, and a lack of funding as some of the challenges which added to teachers’ work and impacted negatively upon teachers’ health and well-being.

The findings from this study provide a starting point for further discussion and research into Tasmanian EC teachers’ work perceptions. The data are used to argue for improved consultation between DoE, educational policymakers, government and EC teachers, specifically in relation to strategies and procedures which might best support teachers working in EC classrooms. In particular, effective working partnerships may help to identify practices which assist in reducing some of the negative aspects reported by participants, the implementation of which may improve

work place satisfaction, and, over time, improve the status of the EC teaching profession.

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Table of Contents

Declaration.....	ii
Approval to Copy.....	iii
Statement of Ethical Conduct.....	iv
Abstract	v
Acknowledgements	viii
Table of Contents	x
List of Tables.....	xiii
List of Figures	xv
Glossary	xvi
Key Concepts.....	xix
Chapter 1 Introduction	1
1.1 Introduction	2
1.2 Teachers in Early Childhood	4
1.3 Context – Curriculum Reforms	5
1.4 Conceptual Framework for the Study.....	7
1.5 Significance of the Study.....	8
1.6 Topic–Scope and Limitations.....	12
1.7 Thesis Overview	12
1.8 Summary of Chapter 1.....	13
Chapter 2 Literature Review	14
2.1 Background to the Study	15
2.2 EC Contexts and Terms.....	16
2.3 Living in a World of Constant Change.....	19
2.4 Teaching in Today’s Educational Systems.....	33
2.5 The Effects of Change Upon Teachers and their Work Lives	41
2.6 Summary of Chapter 2.....	47

Chapter 3 Methods	48
3.1 Selection of the Research Approach.....	48
3.2 Ethical Considerations.....	52
3.3 Study Sample.....	55
3.4 Study Time Line	58
3.5 Data Collection Instruments	59
3.6 Data Generation Processes	63
3.7 Data Analysis.....	68
3.8 Reliability and Validity	74
3.9 Minimising Bias	76
3.10 Summary of Chapter 3.....	76
Chapter 4 Results	77
4.1 Study Sample.....	77
4.2 Teaching Background.....	78
4.3 Class Context.....	81
4.4 Questionnaire Responses Concerning Change	82
4.5 EC Teachers' Perceptions of the Highlights of Teaching	91
4.6 EC Teachers' Perceptions of the Downsides of Teaching.....	94
4.7 Interviewees' Responses Regarding Reasons for Becoming Teachers	97
4.8 Interviewees' Perceptions of the One Facet of Their Work They Would Like to Change.....	99
4.9 Interviewees' Responses Regarding the Impact of Change Upon Them and Their Teaching.....	102
4.10 Interviewees' Responses Regarding Perceptions of the Requirement That They Work 35 Hours for a Teaching Week.....	105
4.11 Summary of Chapter 4.....	106
Chapter 5 Discussion	108
5.1 Study Sample – Demographics.....	108
5.2 Discussion Related to RQ1 – EC Teachers as Practitioners' Responses to Change... ..	110
5.3 Discussion Related to RQ2 – Highlights of EC Teaching.....	130
5.4 Discussion Related to RQ3 – Downsides of Teaching in EC.....	142
5.5 Discussion Related to RQ4 – EC Teachers' Perceptions of the Impact of Change.....	157
5.6 Summary of Chapter 5.....	173

Chapter 6 Summary, Conclusions, Implications and Recommendations	175
6.1 Summary of the Study	175
6.2 Conclusions in relation to RQ1 – EC Teachers’ Responses to Change.....	184
6.3 Conclusions in relation to RQ2 – Highlights of EC Teaching	187
6.4 Conclusions in relation to RQ3 – Downsides of EC Teaching	190
6.5 Conclusions in relation to RQ4 – Impact of Change Upon Teachers and Their Work	193
6.6 Implications Arising From the Study	196
6.7 Recommendations for Further Research	207
6.8 Conclusion.....	209
References	211
Appendices.....	233
Appendix A Ethics: Letter of Approval to Conduct Research.....	234
Appendix B Information Letter to Tasmanian Principals	237
Appendix C Information Letter to EC Teachers	240
Appendix D EC Teachers’ Questionnaire.....	243
Appendix E EC Teachers’ Focus Group Interview Consent Form.....	248
Appendix F Reminder Note for EC Teacher.....	250
Appendix G Letter Acknowledging Principal’s Contributions.....	252
Appendix H Email to Focus Group Interviewees	254
Appendix I One Example of an Invitation to Attend Focus Group Interview	256
Appendix J Focus Group Interview Schedule.....	258
Appendix K Summary of Findings for EC Teachers	260

List of Tables

Table 1.1	<i>Employment Status, Gender and Average Age</i>	3
Table 3.1	<i>Questionnaire and Interview Coding</i>	55
Table 3.2	<i>Sample Questionnaire</i>	56
Table 3.3	<i>Sample Focus Group Interviews</i>	57
Table 3.4	<i>Study Time Line</i>	58
Table 3.5	<i>Questionnaire Colour Coding</i>	64
Table 3.6	<i>Framework of Analysis: Links to Questionnaire, Interview Items, Domains and Categories</i>	69
Table 4.1	<i>Teaching Specialisation</i>	79
Table 4.2	<i>Years of Teaching Experience</i>	80
Table 4.3	<i>Grade Level Distribution</i>	82
Table 4.4	<i>Teachers' Responses to Change-Related Issues – Lowest to Highest Mean Scores</i>	84
Table 4.5	<i>Teachers' Responses to Teaching in EC – Lowest to Highest Mean Score</i>	87
Table 4.6	<i>Time Spent on Teaching-Related Tasks – Highest to Lowest Amounts of Time</i>	90
Table 4.7	<i>EC Teachers' Perceptions of the Highlights of Teaching</i>	91
Table 4.8	<i>EC Teachers' Perceptions of the Downsides of Teaching</i>	95
Table 4.9	<i>Reasons for Becoming a Classroom Teacher</i>	98
Table 4.10	<i>Change Aspirations for the Role of an EC Teacher</i>	100
Table 4.11	<i>Interviewees' Perceptions of the Impact of Change</i>	103

Table 4.12	<i>Teachers' Perceptions of Working a 35-Hour Week</i>	106
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List of Figures

<i>Figure 1.1</i>	Relationships between the four research questions.	8
<i>Figure 3.1</i>	Relationships between the three lenses.....	51

Glossary

The purpose of the glossary is to provide a list of the abbreviations, key terms and key concepts cited in this thesis.

Abbreviations

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
AEU	Australian Education Union
COAG	Council of Australian Governments
DEEWR	Department of Employment Education and Workplace Relations
DoE	Department of Education, Tasmania
ECE	Early childhood education refers to Kindergarten to Grade 2 education inclusive
EC	Early childhood an abbreviation of ECE
ELs	<i>Essential Learnings</i> (ELs) curriculum documents – The ELs were being phased into schools across Tasmania prior to the start of this study (DoE, 2002a)
ENI	Educational Needs Indexation – A formula for measuring the economic status of DoE schools
Kindergarten	In Tasmanian schools Kindergarten is available on a voluntary, part-time basis with children attending for

approximately 10 hours weekly. Enrolment is open to children aged 4 years on the 1st of January.

RQ	Research Question
TRB	Teacher Registration Board
UK	United Kingdom
USA	United States of America

Key Terms

“Children” and “students”	These terms have been used interchangeably, with the intention of referring equally to younger people enrolled in ECE. In Tasmanian schools, upon commencing school, children are often identified as students, whereas the term children tends to refer to those in child care centres, who are not yet at school.
Districts	The organisation of education districts by the Department of Education, Tasmania.
Early childhood education	ECE in Tasmania is defined as including Kindergarten to Grade 2, which are usually comprised of students aged 4 – 8 years.
Inclusion	Inclusion refers to the practice of “attempting to provide for all students, including students who have disabilities, in regular schools. Inclusion implies providing for all students within the educational program of the regular school” (DoE, 2010c, para. 3). In Tasmania, often teachers use the terms inclusion and integration interchangeably.
Special needs	A term used when referring to students with high or additional learning needs. These students often require specific or intensive support and/or remediation. The terms “included students” and “students with high needs” are used synonymously with special needs.

Key Concepts**EC Teachers as Practitioners**

A conceptual lens to acknowledge teachers as a classroom practitioner. This lens includes gender, specialisation, years of teaching experience and those aspects of classroom practice which relate to teachers' work, planning, assessment and interpersonal relationships with others.

EC Teachers as Professionals

A lens used to categorise themes which are relative to education as an industry, teachers as a body of professionals, and to incorporate aspects involving the broader nature of teachers' work. Professionals are defined as a group who hold a "recognised qualification" and work within the EC sector of school (Fleet & Clyde, 1993, p. 200).

The professional lens includes intrapersonal aspects which individuals perceive they may have limited or no capacity to influence.

Contextual Aspects of EC Teaching

This domain refers to the influences which are often outside the control of the individual teacher, and the classroom, but nevertheless, impact upon school and classroom settings. For instance, external categories within the contextual domain/lens include societal/media attitudes, DoE, school locality (region/district), school ENI and funding.

Chapter 1

Introduction

Over the past three decades schools have faced numerous changes which have impacted upon teachers and the work they undertake. The ways teachers have managed their work, and the effects of change, have been a source of ongoing educational interest and research. Globally, the research literature has reported how change affects teachers and their work lives (Ballet & Kelchtermans, 2009; Easthope & Easthope, 2000; Galton, MacBeath, Page & Steward, 2002; Gardner & Williamson, 2004; MacBeath, Galton, Steward, MacBeath & Page, 2006; MacBeath, Galton, Steward, Page & Edwards, 2004). Like teachers elsewhere, Tasmanian teachers have been affected by various government reforms, as well as societal, economic, and technological changes.

The impact of these changes affects all teachers, including those working in the early years. However, in most of the literature the work lives of EC teachers is presented either as a component of the primary sector or it is non-existent. Hence, this study is intended to add to the existing literature by examining Tasmanian EC teachers' perceptions of teaching within selected EC classrooms.

1.1 Introduction

World-wide social, economic, political, and technological changes have impacted upon teachers and their work lives. Internationally, research literature has reported the effects of global change, with authors confirming that change-related issues have greatly influenced teachers' workloads (Ballet & Kelchtermans, 2009; Easthope & Easthope, 2000).

Societal change, curriculum and policy reforms, and resourcing issues are just some of the challenges faced by teachers; these aspects have altered the nature of teachers' work and the ways in which teachers teach and students learn. In this regard, it has been reported that, "teaching has had to rise to the challenge of a world in which the pace, nature and contexts of learning have been radically transformed" (Galton & MacBeath, 2008, p. 5). Not all teachers cope with educational changes; Coombs Richardson, Glessner and Tolson (2007) report that "at the beginning of the 1993-1994 school year, about 192,400 [Australian] teachers entered the profession, but by the following school year, about 213,000 (equivalent to 110% of those just hired) had left" (p. 1). "Annually nationwide, Australia loses 2300 teachers who are in their first five years of teaching" (cited in O'Brien & Goddard, 2006, p. 48). In the UK, research by Kyriacou and Kunc (2007) reported that, "about 40 per cent of those who embark on a training course ... never become teachers, and of those who do become teachers, 40 per cent are no longer in teaching 5 years later" (p. 1246). "One of the most serious crises and challenges facing the public-school system and the teaching profession is the mass exodus from teaching related to the demographic turnover of teachers in the profession" (Hargreaves, 2003, p. 121).

In Tasmania *The DoE Annual Report 2009-10* (DoE, 2010a) published statistics relating to the health status of employees, reporting that staff stress is consistently among the four injury types, with stress being the greatest number of injuries requiring referrals for rehabilitation. A considerable amount of literature has been published in relation to teacher stress and health-related issues; indeed some authors (see Brown Ralph & Brember, 2002; Hargreaves, 2003; Tsai, Fung & Chow, 2006) contend that teaching is one of the most stressful occupations. However, Klassen and Chiu (2010) argue that people who have a realistic view of the role of the teacher and the nature of teaching are more likely to remain in the teaching profession. Statistics included in the *DoE Annual Report 2009-2010* (DoE, 2010a) relating to employment status, gender and the average age of all Tasmanian teachers are presented in Table 1.1.

Table 1.1

Employment Status, Gender and Average Age (DoE, 2010a, p. 47)

Employment Status	Female Average age (Years)	Male Average age (Years)
Full-time fixed term	34.73	34.16
Full-time permanent	45.07	44.51
Part-time fixed term	41.87	43.20
Part-time permanent	45.55	46.55
Total	44.38	43.93

Most of the teachers were female (75.92%), employed on a permanent full-time basis, and reported an “average age of 44.27” years (DoE, 2010a, p. 47). These data concur with previous studies which have reported Tasmanian teachers are members of an ‘ageing’ (Gardner & Williamson, 2004) and highly feminised profession. This

pattern of gender distribution is consistent with the School Australia, 2010 data (Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS], 2011). The ABS reporting on data gathered in 2010 stated “males comprised 19% of primary school teaching staff (FTE [Full-time equivalent]) a decrease of 11% since 2000” (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2011). Likewise, the numbers of female British teachers working in nursery, primary, and secondary schools have risen by “4 per cent to 304,000” during the years “1981/82 to 2001/02”, while “the number of [full-time] male teachers fell by 33 per cent to 134,000” (Office for National Statistics, 2010). Generally, women represented the majority of full-time teachers in nursery and primary schools. Hence, there is a perceived need for positive male role models in the lives of children which has sent “calls for male teachers ... reverberating around education systems in English-speaking countries” (Mills, Martino & Lingard, 2004, p. 354).

1.2 Teachers in Early Childhood

Early childhood teachers, like all Tasmanian teachers, are required to uphold the Tasmanian Teacher Registration Board (TRB) code of professional conduct, and the practices of “dignity, respect, integrity, empathy and justice”, principles which underpin the teaching profession in Tasmania (TRB, 2011). Furthermore, any person wanting to teach in a Tasmanian school must pass a good character check, possess TRB registration, have successfully completed a tertiary teaching qualification, be an effective communicator, and be committed to ongoing professional learning (TRB, 2011). Teacher registration helps to ensure that educational programs are delivered by respected, qualified, and committed professionals; a practice which contributes to effective teaching and positive student outcomes.

Worldwide trends, particularly in the early years, have been instrumental in increasing the demand for, and provision of, quality learning environments. Programs such as *Sure Start* (Anning, Cullen & Flear, 2009) and *The Effective Provision of Pre-School Education* (EPPE) Project (Sylva, Melhuish, Sammon, Siraj-Blatchford & Taggart, 2004) in the UK have seen an increase in public funding for the education of young children and their families. Likewise, in the USA, *Head Start*, *High/Scope*, and *The Project Approach* (cited in Johnson, Christie & Wardle, 2005) have provided intervention supports. In northern Italy, the city of Reggio Emilia is internationally renowned for the quality municipal early care and educational programs it provides for young children and families (Roopnarine & Johnson, 2005). Globally, the critical importance of providing high quality programs for children during the early years is reflected also in changing governmental policies and independent reports (such as the EPPE project discussed earlier).

1.3 Context – Curriculum Reforms

In Tasmania, teachers have been subjected to a succession of curriculum reforms, all of which have impacted upon teachers and their work. As an example, over a 9 year period (2002-2010), Tasmanian teachers were required to implement the release of five major curriculum initiatives:

- 2002 *Essential Learnings Framework* (ELs) (DoE, 2002a).
- 2004 *Tasmania Essential Connections: A Guide to Young Children's Learning* (Birth–5 Years) (DoE, 2004).
- 2006 ELs Framework was refined and renamed the *Tasmanian Curriculum K–10 Syllabus and Support Materials* (DoE, 2006).

- 2010 *K–12 Australian Curriculum* in English, History, Mathematics, and Science (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority [ACARA], 2011).
- 2010 *Belonging, Being and Becoming: Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF)* (DEEWR, 2010a).

In Tasmania, the pace of curriculum change has been unrelenting. Williamson and Myhill (2008) reported that over a “5 year period 1995-2000 it has been calculated that 80 major policies were announced and [Tasmanian] schools were expected to implement all of them” (p. 42).

The success of curriculum implementations has been dependent upon teachers’ readiness, willingness and preparedness to integrate policies and educational reforms into teaching practice (Alvestad et al., 2009; Burgess et al., 2010; Ebbeck & Waniganayake, 2003; Galton et al., 2002). As Fullan (2001) suggested, irrespective of political intent, teachers’ attitudes and beliefs “affect implementation” (p. 72) and student outcomes.

EC teachers are beginning to use new technologies in the classroom not only for administrative tasks but also in teaching (Ebbeck & Waniganayake, 2003). The challenge for EC teachers is effectively how to use technology in the classroom. Qing (2007) reported teachers with limited technological knowledge and expertise find incorporating ICT into their classroom practice to be challenging. Australian teachers reported that without adequate ICT support staff, or other assistance, incorporating technology into the classroom was confronting (Ryan, Scott & Walsh, 2010).

1.4 Conceptual Framework for the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine EC teachers' perceptions of teaching in Tasmanian DoE classrooms. Hence four research questions were developed:

RQ1: What change-related factors do EC teachers perceive as having had the most impact upon them and their work?

This question aimed to yield insights into Tasmanian EC teachers' perceptions of change using a pre-determined set of questionnaire statements.

RQ2: What are teachers' perceptions regarding the highlights of teaching in EC classrooms?

In addition to change, insights into those aspects of teaching which contributed to teacher satisfaction and retention were addressed by RQ2 using questionnaire and interview responses.

RQ3: What are EC teachers' perceptions regarding the downsides of teaching?

RQ3 used questionnaire and interviews to examine teachers' perceptions of the challenges of teaching in EC classrooms.

RQ4: In what ways do the issues reported by EC teachers impact upon them and their work?

RQ4 provided an opportunity to ascertain the effects of change upon EC teachers and their work using questionnaire and interviews.

Figure 1.1 represents the interrelationships between the four research questions, illustrating that in this study EC teachers are key players, central to educational change and its effects. Hence a teacher's individual qualities, which include teaching qualification (specialisation), years of experience, and gender, as well as the contexts (class size, grade level, and school demographics within which teachers teach) are important considerations. Skills, knowledge, and context affect teachers' perceptions of their work lives.

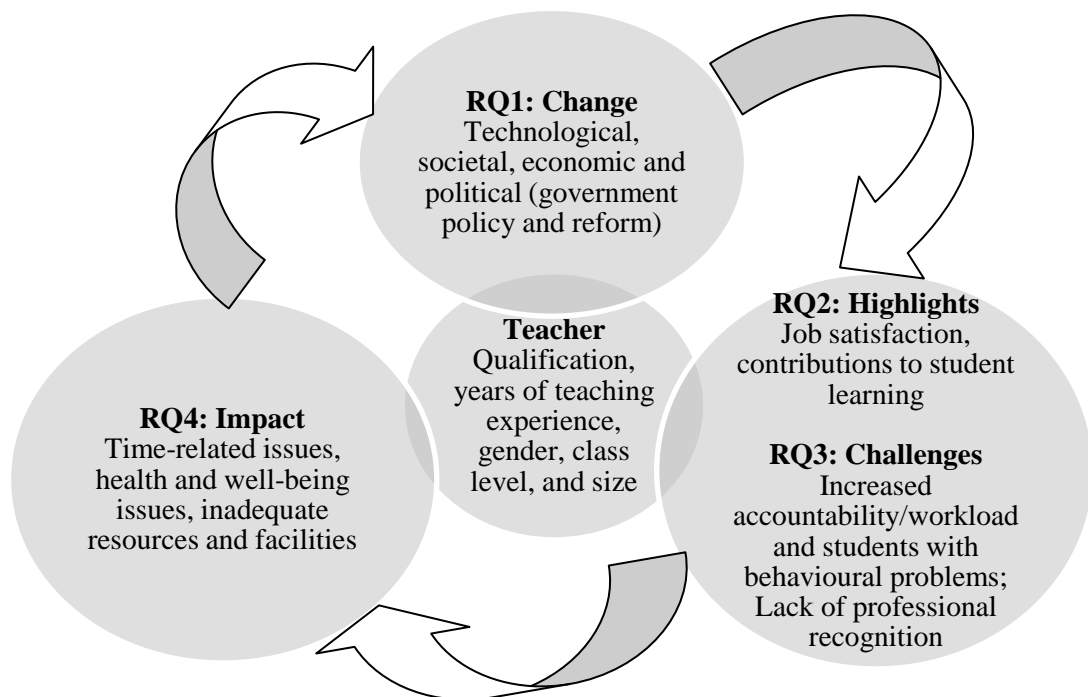


Figure 1.1. Relationship between the four research questions.

1.5 Significance of the Study

Internationally teachers' work is an area of research interest. In the UK, Kryiaciou (2001) highlighted key directions for future research related to teachers' capacity to cope with change, the nature of successful coping actions employed by teachers, and investigation and identification of potential stress "triggers" (p. 33). Australian

educational research has pursued a range of health related issues, including: teacher stress in day care centres (Fenech, 2006) and inclusive educational settings (Forlin, 2004); the experiences of beginning teachers (O'Brien & Goddard, 2006); ECE teachers' stress (Sims, Hayden, Palmer & Hutchins, 2000; Swick & Williams, 2006); teacher morale (Kilgallon, Maloney & Lock, 2008; Young, 2000); teacher sustainment (Kilgallon, 2006) and coping mechanisms (Pithers & Soden, 1998).

In Tasmania, there have been few research studies undertaken that have examined EC teachers' work lives. Studies, such as that conducted by Easthope and Easthope (2007), have considered secondary and primary as separate sectors. However, it was not clear whether EC views were included among data reported under the category of primary teachers. These authors used case study methodology to seek the perceptions of "teachers who taught grades 11 and 12 in Tasmanian State Secondary Colleges or private schools" (Easthope & Easthope, 2007, p. 2). In their findings, Easthope and Easthope (2007) reported "teachers' work has been subject to intensification in Tasmania, as it has been elsewhere" (p. 56). An earlier study by Gardner and Williamson (2004) commissioned by the Tasmanian Branch of the Australian Education Union (AEU), investigated the impact of educational reforms upon primary and secondary teachers and allied workers, and considered both the highlights and challenges of teaching.

One of few studies that have involved Tasmanian EC teachers is that of Kelly (2004) who used case study methodology to examine the nature of Tasmanian Kindergarten teachers' (n=4) work. His research found that, similar to other teachers, "kindergarten teachers' work is complex and diverse" (p. 303) in terms of social interactions between teacher, child, and parents, and the educational programming.

A more recent Tasmanian study by Overton (2009) examined “how change affects [EC] teachers, and focussed on the theme of power as experienced by these teachers” (p. 1). Overton identified “three dimensions of power” in the workplace that affected teachers and their attitudes towards teaching. The power dimensions were: (i) “imposed power” or “bureaucratic power” relating to the “political nature of ongoing educational change”; (ii) “disempowerment” concerning the “intentional or unintentional actions” which undermine teachers; and (iii) “empowerment of self and others” including the ways in which teachers seek “personal and professional empowerment” (pp. 2-3).

In general, research into teachers’ work lives has focussed on primary and secondary school sectors (Churchill & Williamson, 2004; Day & Gu, 2010; Easthope & Easthope, 2007; Galton & MacBeath, 2008; Gardner & Williamson, 2004; MacBeath et al., 2006; Poppleton & Williamson, 2004). Clearly, it is unwise to over generalise findings from primary and secondary contexts to the EC sector, given that the settings in which teaching occurs are different, in terms of context, philosophical underpinnings, and pedagogy.

Kindergarten students are more dependent upon adults than primary or secondary students (Tsai et al., 2006). Often, EC teachers help younger students to open lunch boxes, tie shoe laces, fasten buttons, and unzip bags. It might be argued that primary and secondary teachers attend to other issues, which might include teenage pregnancy, drug and alcohol dependency, homelessness, emotional disturbances, and mental health issues. While many issues are shared it is fair to say that each sector presents its own unique set of challenges.

The study reported here has the potential to add to the earlier research conducted by Kelly (2004), which investigated Kindergarten teachers' work lives. Secondly, given there is scant research available which reports the effects of change upon EC teachers, this study has the potential to stimulate initial discussions of the impacts of contextual change. Moreover, investment and interest in ECE is expanding as the importance of early learning is increasingly acknowledged and valued internationally. Nationally, the EYLF (DEEWR, 2010a), the new early years' curriculum frameworks, reflects this trend. Thirdly, the data reported will provide policy makers, governments, teachers and interested parties with rich insights into the work lives of EC teachers in Tasmanian schools. An examination of Tasmanian EC teachers' perceptions of their work lives is required and can be the basis for dialogue between educational stakeholders, and as a foundation for subsequent research.

This study sought the perceptions of EC teachers working in the DoE, Tasmania. Schools in Tasmania over the past decade have been involved in constant change. Although the effects of these changes have been reported, the experiences and perceptions of EC teachers have neither been independently examined nor reported. Flear (2000) suggests that "in considering the research evidence on the value of early childhood education, it is becoming increasingly critical that some form of intervention is needed in raising the status of early childhood education" (p. 49). Hence, this current study aims to contribute to the existing literature regarding Tasmanian EC teachers' perception of teaching.

1.6 Topic–Scope and Limitations

This study was conducted in three of the eight regions in Tasmania (North, North-West, and South). As this study was small scale, it was not considered feasible to cover all areas of Tasmania. This can be seen as a limitation of the study as it reduces the generalisability of findings. However, within the three regions selected for inclusion in the study, a range of different socio-economic school contexts were identified by referring to the Tasmanian Educational Needs Indexation (ENI). Further, stratified purposive sampling (Burns, 2000) ensured that the population selected was representative of the group under investigation, that being EC teachers working in the DoE, Tasmania.

1.7 Thesis Overview

This thesis is presented in six chapters. The Introduction chapter is followed by Chapter 2, a literature review which addresses the four research questions through an examination of the literature surrounding educational change-related issues and the impact of change upon EC teachers and their work.

Chapter 3 describes the methodology surrounding the research approaches and conceptual framework. This chapter also provides information relating to the ethical processes and considerations, phases of the study and data generation instruments, which included questionnaire and focus group interviews. In addition, the data analysis procedures applied to participants' data are presented.

Chapter 4 presents participants' questionnaire and interview, with a discussion of the findings provided in Chapter 5. Lastly, Chapter 6 provides a summary, conclusions, implications arising from the study, and recommendations for further research.

1.8 Summary of Chapter 1

This chapter has discussed the research context, background, and the social, economic, political, and technological changes which have impacted upon teachers and their work lives. The conceptual framework, research questions, scope, and limitations of the study in relation to teachers' work lives were presented. Further, the lack of research literature regarding EC teachers' work lives and the importance of ECE has been highlighted. Given the gap in research pertaining to EC teachers' work lives it is evident that research into this specialist area is long overdue and warranted. Identification of issues which impact upon teachers' work lives will be of interest to EC teachers, governments, policy makers and others interested in the nature of teachers' work lives.

The following chapter presents a review of the literature concerning teachers' work lives, beginning with an overview of ECE contexts and terms.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Globally, economic, societal, political, and technological changes influence teachers' work, health, and well-being (Bottery, 2006; Thirumurthy, Szecsi, Hardin & Koo, 2007). In the recent past, teachers' work has been examined at a state level, within Tasmania (Easthope & Easthope, 2000; Gardner & Williamson, 2004; Kelly, 2004), nationally (Overton, 2009) and internationally (Ballet & Kelchtermans, 2009; Galton, Hargreaves, Comber, Wall & Pell, 1999; Galton & MacBeath, 2008; Galton et al., 2002; Hargreaves & Galton, 2002; Poppleton & Williamson, 2004). Studies have examined teachers' workloads (Easthope & Easthope, 2000; Gardner & Williamson, 2004); and the impact of policy changes (Alvestad, Duncan & Berge, 2009; Burgess, Robertson & Patterson, 2010). It has been recognised that teachers' work has increased dramatically (Galton & MacBeath, 2008; Galton et al., 2002) and is affected by a number of issues that shape teachers' professional experiences, attitudes, and work perceptions.

In education, one of the main concerns is that many of the changes proposed by policy makers lack regard for teachers' circumstances and students' learning preferences (Hargreaves, 2003). Educational change generates "more pressure on teachers to change both themselves and their practices" (Brown et al., 2002, p. 10). The education of contemporary students varies drastically in comparison with the experiences of previous generations of learners (Thirumurthy et al., 2007). Change is

a normal aspect of schooling and many studies have been undertaken to investigate the impact of educational change upon the working lives of primary and secondary teachers around the world. However, limited research has been undertaken specifically to examine the perceptions of EC teachers working in this culture of constant and rapid change. Hence this research study was designed to examine Tasmanian EC teachers' perceptions of teaching using the following four research questions:

RQ1: What change-related factors do EC teachers perceive as having had the most impact upon them and their work?

RQ2: What are teachers' perceptions regarding the highlights of teaching in EC classrooms?

RQ3: What are EC teachers' perceptions regarding the downsides of teaching?

RQ4: In what ways do the issues reported by EC teachers impact upon them and their work?

A review of the literature has revealed a number of issues that have affected teachers' work and practices. These aspects are discussed below in relation to the literature reviewed.

2.1 Background to the Study

Internationally, the importance of ECE has been recognised, with numerous studies investigating student learning and teaching pedagogy. These studies have focussed on obtaining insights into practices which enhance student outcomes and teacher

practices; however limited research has specifically investigated the perceptions of EC teachers working in this constantly changing educational context. In contrast, the perceptions of secondary (Easthope & Easthope, 2000; 2007; Poppleton & Williamson, 2004) and/or primary teachers (Galton et al., 1999; Galton & MacBeath, 2008; Galton et al., 2002; Hargreaves & Galton, 2002) has generated considerable literature.

Although ECE is often linked, or incorporated within the primary sector, the work lives of EC teachers, in comparison with those of primary teachers, are vastly different (Kelly, 2004). Early childhood teachers recognise the early years are critical; these years lay the foundations for growth and brain development (Charlesworth, 2011), and without stimulating learning experiences a child may not reach his/her maximum potential. Teaching in EC classrooms tends to be less formal, when compared to structured environments often found in upper primary (Kelly, 2004) or secondary classrooms. For instance, play based experiences are provided in preference to formalised learning and academic tasks (Alvestad et al., 2009).

The importance of EC teachers' work lives ought to be acknowledged. Research into how change affects EC teachers working in ECE is of importance as it has the potential to influence students' learning and outcomes well beyond these years.

2.2 EC Contexts and Terms

The term ECE is broad and includes a wide range of age groups and educational settings, due to variations in attendance requirements and the age at which a child commences school. Consequently, differences in terminology exist between states, and between countries. Hence, prior to a discussion of the literature reviewed, it is important to acknowledge these subtle variations.

In Canada, for example, children may commence compulsory education or elementary school (the first 6 – 8 years of schooling) at either age 5 or 6 years with subtle variations found between provinces and territories (Council of Ministers of Education, Canada, n.d.). Likewise, in the USA, irrespective of state or territory, children who turn 5 years of age in the latter part of the year are able to attend Kindergarten which is the first year of school, the year prior to Grade 1. In comparison, the entry age for formal schooling varies in the USA by 2 years. To illustrate, in Arkansas and Connecticut, the entry age is 5 years, whereas in Massachusetts and New Jersey enrolments commence at age 6, and in some states, such as North Carolina and Wyoming, entry into formal schooling seen as Grade 1 commences at 7 years (Education Commission of the States, n.d.). Although school entry ages vary between states, the term elementary refers to Grade 1 and all American school children aged between 6 and 11 years (Klassen & Chiu, 2010).

In contrast to North America, in the English system, children begin school in Reception between the ages of 4 and 5 years. Year 1 enrolls students aged 5-6 years, and Year 6 is for students of 11 and 12 years (Galton & MacBeath, 2010).

In the UK, ECE is included within the primary sector. Whereas, in Ireland “senior infant” refers to “the second year of formal schooling..., with the average age of pupils between five and six years old” (Murphy, 2004, p. 245). Children in Norway are aged 6 years before they commence the first year of elementary schooling (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2009). In Australia, ECE refers to children enrolled in childcare centres, pre-schools, or attending the formal or compulsory years of schooling, with the latter usually being situated on a primary school site.

Kindergarten in Tasmanian schools is available on a part-time basis with children attending for approximately 10 hours weekly. Enrolment is available to children aged 4 years and is non-compulsory. In Tasmania, compulsory full-time ECE begins in the Preparatory year (age 5 years) and concludes in Grade 2, with Grade 3 marking the start of primary school, and although primary is sometimes used to include all of the years from Kindergarten to Grade 6.

The number of students within any one classroom varies; however, in Australia, educator-child ratios are mandated by The National Quality Standard, determined in accordance with the child's age and educator's qualification level. In most Australian states/territories the educator-to-child ratio is 1:15 for children 3 years and over (COAG, 2009, p. 21). Many Australian EC classrooms are purpose-built, and provide child-friendly furniture and equipment. Mostly, in ECE, teachers strongly advocate for a child-centred, flexible learning program with opportunities for children to explore and enjoy outdoor experiences. In contrast in some countries (e.g., Singapore), "children may have no access to the outdoors, provision being made indoors for 'outdoor' activities" (Ebbeck & Waniganayake, 2003, p. 193). These national and international system anomalies mean that, broadly speaking, ECE addresses the learning needs of children aged between birth and 8 years across different sectors of education.

The focus of this study involves EC Tasmanian teachers working in ECE classrooms with children aged between 4 and 8 years. A search of the literature was undertaken to ascertain how educational trends affect teachers and their work lives. Commonly, EC research has focussed on the child, learning, and pedagogy, resulting in there being limited recent literature reporting EC teachers' perceptions of change and how this affects teachers and their work. Nyland (2001) observes that, since 1960, key

research directions in Australia have specifically included an interest in the child, women entering the workforce, and an increase in child care demands. Nevertheless, the dearth of ECE literature addressing the research questions made it necessary to incorporate within this review literature from the primary and secondary sectors. However, caution is warranted in applying these findings to EC teachers. The following discussion considers the four research questions posed in this study, in light of the literature reviewed.

2.3 Living in a World of Constant Change

The impact of change upon secondary and primary teachers and their work, as discussed earlier, has resulted in extensive literature. Within the field of educational change, Michael Fullan is recognised as possibly one of the most prominent and influential writers. Fullan (2001) described educational change as a process that “involves learning to do something new”, further, change requires learning “new meanings, new behaviours, new skills, and new beliefs” (p. 84); hence, it would seem that “aside from being inevitable, change is needed” (Fullan, 2001, p. 123).

In the context of teachers’ work Fullan (2001) suggested change provides teachers with opportunities for growth, development and access to new ideas and pedagogies. Ebbeck and Waniganayake (2003) proposed however, that, for some teachers, departing from routines, learning and implementing new skills is both uncomfortable and overwhelming. Berliner (1998, 2001) and others (Huberman, 1989; McCormack, Gore & Thomas, 2006) contend that, for teachers, learning is progressive and developmental. Hence, it would seem that although new skills and pedagogies provide opportunities for renewal, they take time to acquire and refine. Hargreaves (2003) states that for teachers learning, societal, political, technological and

economic changes are complex, unpredictable and often occur rapidly (Fullan, 2001; Hargreaves & Fullan, 1998), all of which can subsequently impact upon teachers' work in the classroom.

Families in the changing world.

Globally, economic pressures and societal changes affect students, families, teachers and their work (Day, Stobart, Sammons & Kingston, 2006; Duncan, 2006; Galton & MacBeath, 2008; Kyriacou & Kunc, 2007; Mackenzie, 2007; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2009). In response to external demands, increasing numbers of women enter the workforce and attempt to balance parental roles with employment (Roopnarine & Johnson, 2005).

Figures indicate that "61% of American mothers with children [less than] 3 years of age were employed in 2000, compared to 34% in 1975" (Roopnarine & Johnson, 2005, p. 44). In Australia, "45% of children aged 0-2 years had both parents employed" (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2010). Hence, the demand for child care placements has risen commensurate with the increase in the numbers of working parents.

Roopnarine and Johnson (2005) state that "56% of mothers with a baby [less than] 1 year of age use some sort of care arrangement" (p. 45). In Australia, parental demand for formal child care has led to a steady increase in demand for placements. In 1999, 17 percent of parents sought care for children, and by 2008 requests for formal child care had risen to 22 percent (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2010). Likewise, Kamerman and Gatenio-Gabel (2007) report that in the USA "in 2002, 11.6 million children or 63 percent of the 18.5 million infants, toddlers and preschool children under age 5, were receiving some type of care other than from their parents on a

regular basis” (p. 28). In light of these societal changes effective school community relationships are important, as they facilitate student transitions between home and school (Hedges & Gibbs, 2005).

Much has been written about the importance of parents and teachers building strong partnerships (Dinham, 2000; Ebbeck & Waniganayake, 2003). Acker (1999), for example, in her study of English primary school teachers’ work, reported that, by comparison with primary or secondary teachers, in the early years parents often have greater contact with schools because of the child’s dependency on adults. She added that, in the early years, parents have more opportunities for regular contact with teachers than with members of any other profession (Acker, 1999). It is interesting to note that although opportunities for parent-teacher contact are common, for various reasons, parents often do not avail themselves of these opportunities (Osborn, McNess, Broadfoot, Pollard & Triggs, 2000), even though effective school/teacher partnerships are recognised as benefiting teachers, parents, and students alike (Boardman, 2005; Noel, 2010).

Children in the changing world.

Literature reports student behaviours are often affected by “family living standards, youth of parents, parental change, parental conflict” (Fergusson & Horwood, 1998, p. 1106) and “family distress” (Arthur, Beecher, Death, Dockett & Farmer, 2008, p. 4). MacBeath et al. (2004) support these findings, advising that inappropriate student behaviour is also commonly associated with limited parenting skills and a lack of parent interest or participation in a child’s education.

Australian writers confirm there has been a rise in the numbers of children living in dysfunctional, blended, extended, single-parent, bilingual, or culturally diverse

families (Arthur, Beecher, Death, Dockett & Farmer, 2008) and also in the numbers of students who are refugees, or others who may have difficulties socialising, having been victims of war (Sims et al., 2000).

For teachers, the problems of teaching an increasingly diverse population, and developing an appreciation and understanding of the nature of this diversity in order to teach and incorporate different cultural values and beliefs effectively can be difficult. There is a need for teachers to appreciate and to be aware of “cultural mores”, while avoiding stereotypical attitudes that fail to recognise individual differences between cultures (Souto-Manning & Dice, 2007). Potentially, conflict arises between teacher and student when cultural ideologies clash, such as if a student comes from a culture that accepts “corporal punishment” (Charlesworth, 2011) as a response to misbehaviour to one that does not, such as in western society. In such situations, how does a teacher respect cultural values? MacBeath and Galton (2008) suggest that differing student abilities, language and economic variations, family dysfunction, and student transience “all bring their own, often formidable, challenges” (p. 11), which for EC classroom teachers may be accentuated when class sizes are large (see class size in Section 2.6).

Integrating all children in education.

Schools in Australia are culturally, linguistically and socially diverse, and like schools in other countries have promoted and supported the integration into mainstream classrooms of students with disabilities and special learning needs.

Over the past two decades, changing attitudes towards inclusive practices within society have seen schools being directed to accept all children into mainstream schooling regardless of their disabilities. This changed educational practice has led

writers such as Forlin (2004) to report that inclusive practices are controversial. On one hand advocates claim that the educational outcomes for both students with and those without disabilities are improved when students with special needs are integrated into mainstream classrooms. Specifically in relation to ECE, Lowenthal (1999) reports that in mainstream education there are positive gains for pre-schoolers with special needs, as such “children with disabilities demonstrate higher levels of social play and competence when they are with non-disabled peers” (p. 22). On the other hand, opponents argue “that there is no unequivocal evidence that inclusion produces better outcomes for children with disabilities, and that the full range of needs of these children cannot be met in mainstream classrooms” (Forlin, 2004, p. 186). For integration to be successful, the “conditions” must be right (Forlin, 2004; Kaufhold, Averez & Arnold, 2006; Lowenthal, 1999; Marks Woolfson & Brady, 2009).

Kaufhold et al. (2006) examined the perceptions of special education teachers (n=228) in South Texas. Fifty percent ‘strongly agreed’ they lacked sufficient school supplies and materials essential for teaching. Primary and secondary teachers commonly reported “that you can’t have inclusion without the resources” (MacBeath et al., 2006, p. 19). Similarly, in relation to education in Hong Kong, Zhang (2011) states that “teachers in special education [have] not been able to make all classes in the school inclusive” because of a lack of resources (p. 8).

Irrespective of educational sector, or grade level, Smith and Smith (2000) state that there is a need for:

more adequate and focused training (for both regular and special education personnel), better consideration of classroom load factors (including class size, ratios, and type and severity of special needs), more reliable support (in-class, collaborative, and administrative), and help to find more time to

meet the increased planning and collaborative demands of inclusive classrooms. (p. 161).

The literature consistently indicates that these recurring themes or necessary conditions are integral to the successful implementation or collapse of inclusionary practices (Chhabra, Srivastava & Srivastava, 2010; Forlin, 2004; Gardner & Williamson, 2004; Keen & Barrett, 2008; Lowenthal, 1999; MacBeath et al., 2006; Talmor, Reiter & Feigin, 2005; Zhang, 2011).

As well as inclusion, Lowenthal (1999) reports that in ECE issues frequently arise during preschoolers' transitions, that is, when children switch between home and school settings. It has been found that "during this adjustment period, children with disabilities may demonstrate behavior problems because of their insecurities" (p. 28). Consequently transitions should be planned well in advance (Forlin et al., 2008; Lowenthal, 1999). As discussed earlier, family and school partnerships play an integral role "in supporting children's ability to cope with the social and emotional passage between home and school" (MacBeath et al., 2006, p. 36), and it is reasonable to assume this expectation rises when children have disabilities or high needs.

Personal issues, including teachers' self-efficacy (Chhabra et al., 2010) in relation to the successful integration of students with special needs, are common themes evident in the literature (e.g., Marks, Woolfson & Brady, 2008; Zhang, 2011). The value of professional learning for teachers of children with special needs was consistently identified in relation to both teacher and student (Burgess et al., 2010; Lowenthal, 1999; MacBeath et al., 2006). Marks et al. (2008) suggested that, although teachers may acquire new knowledge from professional learning, "such experiences may not sufficiently challenge core beliefs about their efficacy as teachers in effecting change

in students with learning difficulties” (p. 233). For inclusionary practices to be successful, teachers need to have a positive attitude and adopt a “credit” view of the child in relation to their competence and learning potential (Fleer et al., 2006). Indeed, Talmor et al. (2005) indicate that “information and professional support correlate with less [incidents of teacher] burnout” (p. 227). However, it is vital that the training should be responsive to teachers’ specific concerns and firstly, to limit potential burnout, teachers must be taught coping strategies when working with students who are included in mainstream classrooms (Forlin et al., 2008). All teachers are feeling the pressures of “coping with special learning needs, against a backdrop of deterioration in classroom behaviour and an increase in anti-school, anti-learning attitudes among pupils in general” (Galton & MacBeath, 2008, p. 59; Kaufhold et al., 2006).

Students with behavioural problems.

While there are differences between countries, it is feasible that a rise in the numbers of students diagnosed with behavioural (e.g., Oppositional Defiance Disorder [ODD], and Conduct Disorder [CD]) and attention disorders (e.g., Attention Deficit and Hyperactivity Disorder, [ADHD], Attention Deficit Disorder [ADD]) has accentuated tensions in western classrooms and thus increased the prevalence of disengaged learners and those with behavioural problems. In the UK, Wheeler (2010) estimated that around “5% of school aged children” are affected by ADHD (p. 12). Australian figures are slightly higher with an estimated “4 - 12 percent of the school-age population (children ages 6 to 12) diagnosed with ADHD” (cited in Regoli, Hewitt & Delisi, 2010, p. 103). Behavioural and attention disorders compromise student achievements. In turn, teachers are held accountable for student learning outcomes.

Research commissioned by the Australian Education Union (AEU), and conducted by Gardner and Williamson (2004), investigated workloads of Tasmanian principals, secondary, and primary teachers, and allied workers. One of the issues reported by teachers in that study, was made in relation “to social changes, the influences of these changes on students’ and their families’ needs and the inappropriate behaviour or disruptive behaviour of some students at school” (p. 8). Thus, societal change has negative effects on students, families, peers and, classroom teachers.

Galton and MacBeath (2008) state that, “even in the early years of primary education, [teachers reported that students] were reluctant to follow instructions and that a minority could be extremely confrontational, use foul language and could even be physically aggressive” (p. 109). In a similar vein, Stephenson, Linfoot and Martin (2000) surveyed Australian EC teachers (n=130) who noted student “distractibility or limited attention span”, and students who were “physically aggressive with others” as being of most concern to teachers working in the early years (p. 230). The environments in which teachers work affect teacher performance and commitment, although not all teachers experience the levels of inappropriate behaviours reported in more westernised countries such as Australia, the UK, and USA.

Illustrative of cultural differences was a cross-cultural study by Atici and Merry (2001), in which they examined student behaviour in British and Turkish primary classrooms. The sample consisted of six British KS-2 (Key Stage 2¹) teachers from Liverpool and six teachers who work at three different primary schools in Adana, Turkey (Atici & Merry, 2001, p. 33). Although, in this study, there were subtle

¹ The education in the UK is classified into stages Key Stage 2 teachers are situated in the primary sector, and teach students aged from 7 to 11 years (UK International, 2011)

variations between countries (e.g., in relation to student talking), researchers concluded misbehaviour was culturally determined and is contextually relevant.

Otten and Tuttle (2010) found that a lack of basic life skills impacts on a child's readiness for school and capacity to work effectively with peers. Without adequate skills students become frustrated, and as such are likely to have negative attitudes and a higher incidence of inappropriate behaviours. Other literature (e.g., Marston, Courtney & Brunetti, 2006; Noel, 2010) has shown that pre-school initiatives play a pivotal role in supporting students and families (Sylva et al., 2004). Students' prior experiences affect their transition into school, and EC students with limited prior experience require more one-to-one support from their teachers, whilst other students may require individual extension or remedial learning opportunities.

To this end, recent reforms have seen a growth in community-based initiatives and inter-agency departmental partnerships. Initiatives such as these create additional pressures for EC teachers as they struggle to schedule further meeting/discussions within their daily teaching.

Curriculum changes and educational reforms.

Curriculum is responsive to societal needs. Internationally, the last two decades have brought about significant changes to curriculum. Easthope and Easthope (2007) report that curriculum changes are ongoing and affect teachers. These researchers refer to the work of Cole (1989) who stated "a major and often unrecognised source of teacher stress in the 1980s [was] the political battle being fought over the values that should be enshrined in our education system" (p. 161). Around this time, Hargreaves and Fullan (1998) also reported that any changes in education bring angst for teachers, especially when curriculum content is pre-determined by policy

makers and curriculum writers. Indeed, the expectation that teachers will implement mandated reforms stifles teachers' creativity and potentially compromises student learning (Churchill & Williamson, 2004; Hargreaves & Fullan, 1998).

In ECE, innovation and exploration engage students and motivate teachers. Hence, a lack of teacher involvement in curriculum design reduces teachers' sense of professionalism and instils a sense of failure among teachers (Brown et al., 2002), with sudden curriculum reforms being found to generate teacher stress resulting in teachers feeling disempowered (Brown et al., 2002; Moriarty, Edmonds, Blatchford & Martin, 2001). Top down decision making is disempowering and when teachers are not consulted about matters which affect them and their work it is hardly surprising they report feeling devalued and stressed (Alvestad et al., 2009; Easthope & Easthope, 2000; Galton & MacBeath, 2008). As Hargreaves and Fullan (1998) reported, when teachers are obliged to accommodate unrealistic expectations they have a tendency to suffer from work overload.

In Tasmania, the succession of curriculum changes (described in Section 1.3 of Chapter 1) was exacerbated by the fact that the curriculum were directed by political party changes and not as a result of consideration for best educational practices for young children in the state. Thus when a new government party came into power many new initiatives undertaken by teachers as part of the new curriculum were discarded, a response which resulted in more policy and reforms (Mulford & Edmunds, 2009), and left teachers feeling confused and disenchanted with educational policy makers (Poppleton & Williamson, 2004).

Continual and unyielding curriculum reform is stressful for teachers (Birch & Smart, 1990; Galton & MacBeath, 2008; MacBeath et al., 2004; Mulford & Edmunds,

2009). Poppleton and Williamson (2004) agree that “multiple waves” of curriculum reforms impact negatively on teachers (p. 310). Adding further pressure to the Tasmanian changes was the poor timing of the release of curriculum reforms, and a lack of consultation by policy makers with teachers (e.g., Burgess et al., 2010). Mulford and Edmunds (2009) stated for “some [Tasmanian] schools” a lack of “readiness” to implement the ELs curriculum meant that these “schools experienced a stressful time” (p. 4).

Research conducted by Birch and Smart (1990) reported that “any attempt to implement a national curriculum policy will face substantial resistance if attempted soon after a state has initiated its own curriculum reforms generating considerable system-wide trauma” (p. 146). Wood (2004) agrees curriculum reforms are often based on the premise “that changes in the quality of teaching and learning, and the outcomes of schooling, can be brought about by a legislated curriculum which ... specifies what forms of knowledge are considered to be worthwhile in social, cultural and economic terms” (p. 363). Nevertheless, as other authors have indicated, without consultation, teachers have a tendency to “pick and choose” adopting or disregarding aspects which they perceive are relevant or irrelevant to teachers’ practice and are of little value to students’ learning (Alvestad et al., 2009; Burgess et al., 2010). Moreover, without consultation, the prescriptive and controlling natures of imposed curricula have the inherent implication that teachers cannot be trusted or are not competent to make professional judgements.

Gardner and Williamson (2004) proposed that teachers are “frustrated at being held accountable by others for outcomes over which they had either limited control or no control” (p. 7). In this vein, another study by Walsh and Gardner (2006) examined the readiness of Year 1 teachers to adopt a constructivist, play-based child-centred

curriculum. Initially the teachers who participated in their study appeared to support the Northern Ireland Council for Curriculum Examinations and Assessment reforms (Walsh & Gardner, 2006). However, teachers were sceptical that the changes would contribute to student learning and were, therefore, reluctant to fully accept the recommendations (Walsh & Gardner, 2006). Such selective implementation defeats the purpose of national (and state based) curriculum reforms (Mulford & Edmunds, 2009). Commentators (e.g., Bishop & Mulford, 1999; Galton & MacBeath, 2010; Kilgallon et al., 2008; Koc, Isiksal & Bulut, 2007; Murphy, 2004; Walsh & Gardner, 2006; Wood, 2004) have emphasised the importance of teacher consultation in curriculum change processes and reforms. Recently, the importance of the ECE sector has attracted considerable attention and as a consequence has undergone a period of substantial change (Burgess et al., 2010). Some of the developments have been instigated by EC professionals wanting to improve the quality and status of EC education. Although, other reforms have come “from political pressure [initiated] ... in an attempt to overcome what communities and nations believe are the falling standards” of education (Ebbeck & Waniganayake, 2003, p. 47). Globally, curriculum reforms and assessment procedures (Galton & MacBeath, 2008) have been imposed on teachers (Scott, Cox & Dinham, 1999) and have altered the way the curriculum is constructed, and consequently, affected pedagogy (Alvestad et al., 2009; Bishop & Mulford, 1999).

The Tasmanian Department of Education (DoE) has moved toward a centrally managed state-wide assessment database. The new system, namely Student Assessment Reporting Information System (SARIS), has permitted greater transparency for student results with students’ records shared between schools and the wider community. At the same time, the performance of schools, individual class

groups, and teachers are easily accessed, compared, and contrasted. Indeed, Kindergarten and Preparatory students' results are available enabling comparisons of individual class performances within DoE schools and intrastate. Inherently, these complex changes increase work pressures for all Tasmanian teachers; however, limited research has been undertaken to investigate the impact of these changes upon EC teachers working in schools.

In some countries, the pace, frequency, and number of curriculum reforms (Easthope & Easthope, 2000; Gardner & Williamson, 2004) have meant teachers were inadequately prepared and ill-equipped to cope (Mulford & Edmunds, 2009; Murphy, 2004). It has been reported that a lack of appreciation by policy makers for the complexity of contemporary classroom practices (Alvestad et al., 2009; Bishop & Mulford, 1999; Dinham, 2000; Galton & MacBeath, 2010; Murphy, 2004), limited support, inadequate time for teacher preparation (Murphy, 2004), and restricted resources have hindered policy implementation processes and increased teacher stress (Mulford & Edmunds, 2009; Wood, 2004).

As discussed earlier, researchers have noted that the success of curriculum implementations has been dependent upon teachers' readiness, willingness, and preparedness to integrate policies and educational reforms into teaching practice (Alvestad et al., 2009; Burgess et al., 2010; Ebbeck & Waniganyake, 2003; Galton & MacBeath, 2010). As Fullan (2001) suggested, irrespective of political intent, teachers' attitudes and beliefs "affect implementation" (p. 72) and student outcomes.

The impact of technology in the classroom.

EC teachers are beginning to use new technologies in the classroom not only for administrative tasks but also in teaching (Ebbeck & Waniganayake, 2003). The

challenge for EC teachers is how to use technology effectively in the classroom. Qing (2007) reported that teachers with limited technological knowledge and expertise find incorporating ICT into their classroom practice to be challenging. Australian teachers reported that without adequate ICT support staff, or other assistance, incorporating technology into the classroom was confronting (Ryan, Scott & Walsh, 2010).

The issues of implementing and using ICT in the classroom have been considered in other studies (Brown, Fluck, Wilson & Fitzallen, 2007; Finger, Russell, Jamieson-Proctor & Russell, 2006; Guha, 2001; Labbo, 2006; Postholm, 2007). In the future, Guha (2001) and Collins (2010) believe that perhaps one of the greatest challenges facing EC teachers is “which technology to use and how to use it to improve teaching and learning” (p. 47). Or as Gibbons (2006) argues, in the EC classroom the challenges are what is classified as technology, how can technology benefit learners and in what ways will technology facilitate social interaction? These questions will be critical to evaluate the use and relevance of technology in ECE. The speed of technological change is a challenge for schools, teachers, and training providers, as educational systems struggle to maintain current resources and ensure teachers are technologically proficient (Brown et al., 2007; Guha, 2001). Finger, Russell, Jamieson-Proctor and Russell (2006) contend that “without adequate infrastructure and technical support, meaningful ICT learning experiences by students might not happen at all” (p. 17).

Greater access to technology has been shown to affect students, families, EC teachers and their work (Collins, 2010; Ryan et al., 2010). Although a literature search was inconclusive in terms of which changes have the greatest impacts upon teachers and their work, Ebbeck and Waniganayake (2003) report that “more often

than not ... [societal and technological changes are] leading educational practices” which have a direct affect upon EC teachers and their work (p. 52).

In addition to societal issues, educational reforms, and increasing availability of technology, an examination of the literature revealed that there are some aspects of their work which teachers report motivates them, increases their commitment, and sustains their satisfaction. These aspects are presented in the following section.

2.4 Teaching in Today’s Educational Systems

Historically, teachers tended to be local women who were considered to be “competent” in the community (Roopnarine & Johnson, 2005; Smith & Smith, 2000). However, over time teachers have entered teaching for a variety of reasons “sometimes by default, sometimes through a love of their subject, [and] sometimes through a desire to work with young children” (Galton & MacBeath, 2008, p. 4). Much of the literature reported that teachers are mostly female, with many wanting to positively influence students’ learning and their futures.

In the past EC teachers were engaged to undertake the “mothering” role in the EC classroom. Most teachers were expected to leave teaching when they married and so EC children were often taught by single women. The realm of EC teaching has become more professional with EC teachers pursuing lifelong careers as teachers of young children. As a result, greater interest has been shown in the need to investigate to the extent to which EC teachers are satisfied by their work with children and families in EC education.

Job satisfaction.

A review of the literature revealed that teaching highlights were multiple and varied with a few writers building on seminal work by Huberman (1993; e.g., Day, Storbart, Sammons & Kingston, 2006; Hardcastle Stanford, 2001) which examined the lives of secondary teachers from their own perspectives. In comparison with rating scales, and true or false statements, the impact of Huberman's (1993) "life history" studies is likely to increase the richness of the data gathered by researchers using his methodology (Marston et al., 2006).

It is interesting to note that mainly qualitative data were employed in most studies, with interviews being used as the main instruments for data collection. Conceivably, conversational exchanges provided researchers with an opportunity to examine teachers' perceptions more deeply. Conversely, quantitative studies such as that of Perrachione, Rosser and Petersen (2008), provide statistical or numerical data, another lens through which to examine phenomena. Mixed methodology, such as that used by Kilgallon et al. (2008), yields rich insights, and perceptions that otherwise would not have been identified by a single method.

Mostly, teaching highlights are encapsulated within the broad category, "job satisfaction" (Caprara, Barbaranelli, Borgogni & Steca, 2003; Klassen & Chiu, 2010; Scott et al., 1999; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2009). Other research in this category has examined EC teachers' morale (Mackenzie, 2007; Young, 2000) and sustainability (Kilgallon et al., 2008), a broad concept which may be defined as the teacher's capacity to remain engaged and to persevere for extended periods of time.

It has been widely recognised that helping students to progress, achieve goals, and develop understanding, knowledge and skills increases EC teachers' satisfaction and

professional efficacy (Fenech, 2006; Hardcastle Stanford, 2001; Kilgallon et al., 2008; Mackenzie, 2007; Marston et al., 2006; Skaalvk & Skaalvik, 2009). This is consistent with EC teachers entering teaching with a goal to “make a difference” in students’ lives by educating future citizens (Marston et al., 2006). Equally, other studies report that the “central role – teaching and learning - to be worthwhile and personally rewarding” (Bishop & Mulford, 1996, p. 195). Scott et al. (1999) concur that “working with students, and seeing them achieve, and increasing one’s professional skills and knowledge – remain very satisfying for most teachers” (p. 302).

Hargreaves (2003) points out that as teachers’ professional knowledge increases so does their capacity to progress learners. Contemporary teachers teach for understanding and provide regular opportunities for students to apply their knowledge in new ways and in different contexts. Other writers have recognised the value of knowing *how* and *what* to plan contributes to teacher satisfaction (Galton & MacBeath, 2008). These attributes are essential because knowledge and learning is constantly shifting (Hargreaves & Fullan, 1998). Hargreaves (2003) contends that “teachers who are personally and professionally developed have evolved a strong sense of themselves as teachers and as people” (p. 63).

Mackenzie (2007) found that access to professional development and teacher morale were related. Recognising an individual teacher’s need for professional learning not only increases teacher morale (Mackenzie, 2007) and efficacy, but is also likely to increase student engagement and achievement (Patterson, Collins & Abbott, 2004). Caprara et al. (2003) noted that in junior high a teacher’s self efficacy contributes to teacher performance, a finding that has been reported by others (Day et al., 2006; Kilgallon et al., 2008) and that is likely also to apply to EC teachers.

Further, and more recently, Day and Gu (2010) have reported that in the primary and secondary sectors “collective efficacy”, or group perceptions play an important part in teacher motivation and sustainability (p. 134). In fact these authors indicate that “both individual and collective efficacy, then, are necessary conditions for good teaching and successful learning” (Day & Gu, 2010, p. 135). They go on to say that these “conditions” are achieved when teachers are resilient and schools are supportive (Day & Gu, 2010), and so work environments also affect teacher satisfaction (Kilgallon et al., 2008). Mackenzie (2007) suggests that when teachers have a positive self-image, “teachers feel good about themselves, each other and their teaching” (p. 92). It is evident that good teaching and learning go hand in hand with teacher efficacy and morale, as does the need to sustain positive relationships with others in the educational community.

Traditionally, teachers worked in isolation in a classroom with a large cohort of students, who, like their teacher, were expected to work independently. Today teachers work collaboratively, with many others, including colleagues, specialist teachers, allied professionals (e.g., social workers, speech and occupational therapists), and teacher assistants (TAs), all of whom have a significant role in supporting teachers. TAs provide support for teachers, and generally assist learners, including those with special needs. TAs often organise teaching materials which support teaching and learning; display students’ work; provide administrative support, and help with classroom organisation (DoE, 2008b).

Recent literature (Gardner & Williamson, 2004; MacBeath et al., 2004) shows that teachers benefit from working in supportive and collaborative partnerships with students, colleagues, and parents (Hargreaves, 2003). Kilgallon et al. (2008) investigated Australian EC teachers’ sustainment in their profession, and examined

the factors which EC teachers considered were critical to remaining motivated. Key among the findings was forming and sustaining positive relationships with students and colleagues.

In their study Noble and Macfarlane (2005) confirmed that EC teachers reported benefits from participating in professional learning, and when working with other “like-minded” (Patterson et al., 2004) professionals (Scott et al., 1999). Developing trusting and respectful relationships with others takes patience and understanding and, as such, teachers may not be able to develop “relationships with [everyone] to the same depth or degree” (McDonald, 2010, p. 33). For some teachers misunderstandings occur as a result of miscommunication, or from differences in professional aspirations or professional status (Overton, 2009).

A North American study undertaken by Marston et al. (2006) to examine the perceptions of “elementary teachers who had been teaching for 15 or more years” and to identify what had sustained teachers in their professional practice (p. 111) found that, in both California and Pennsylvania, teachers “valued relationships with colleagues” (p. 123). Repeatedly, researchers have found that teaching satisfaction is increased when schools and communities work in partnership with productive relationships that benefit students, families, and teachers. It is contended that although no two school environments or communities are alike (Galton & MacBeath, 2008), schools that have effective leaders are better positioned to cope with and meet the demands of school and community by strengthening and unifying relationships, which in turn increases teacher efficacy and morale (Mackenzie, 2007).

Yost and Williamson (2010b) found that “when teachers’ commitments and efforts go unnoticed and/or unsupported they feel dissatisfied and disheartened” (p. 340).

Woods, Jeffrey, Troman and Boyle (1997) report that, “status is important in organizations because it ... reinforces the ego and provides incentive ..., [and] promotes in individuals a sense of responsibility and dependability” (p. 152). In addition, Kilgallon et al. (2008) indicate that the degree to which teachers feel “valued” and “rewarded” will influence the extent of teachers’ commitment to their work, and the profession. To this end, Day and Gu (2010) report that an effective leadership team and supportive colleagues increase “veteran” teachers’ job satisfaction (p. 104).

Largely, much of the literature on teacher satisfaction shows teachers are professionally and personally fulfilled when they contribute to student learning.

Galton and MacBeath (2008) stated that “what motivates primary teachers to remain within the profession and to give their best is the buzz of a ‘magic moment’: when the ‘penny finally drops’, when the pupil’s puzzled gaze gives way to a smile of recognition” (p. 115). However, it has also been reported that over time “many or most teachers experience a decline in satisfaction since beginning teaching” (Scott et al., 1999, p. 302), which in turn can lead to dissatisfaction with their teaching.

Job dissatisfaction.

The literature on teacher dissatisfaction indicates that teachers’ perceptions vary (Nias, 1989), yet most dissatisfaction arises from societal opinion, departmental or system pressures, and school based issues (Dinham, 2000). Further, teacher dissatisfaction and stress were often found to be related, because being tired, unwell, or tense increases the potential for disenchantment across all aspects of work (Nias,

1989). Furthermore, an individual's "mood state" (Wilhelm, Dewhurst-Savellis & Parker, 2000) and stage of career accounts for variations in teacher's work life perceptions (Day & Gu, 2010). These authors found that experienced primary and secondary teachers and new entrants to the teaching professional appear to report fatigue differently. In respect of more mature EC teachers, fatigue may be perceived as a result of increasing age, whilst in comparison, for early career teachers, fatigue may develop as a result of inexperience.

Dinham (2000) found that EC teachers reported feeling dissatisfied with their status in the community. Increased teaching demands and expectations by policy makers, parents, community, and misperceptions about the work they perform leave teachers feeling upset and frustrated (Scott et al., 1999). Mackenzie (2007) indicated that "teachers feel that the media impacts upon teacher morale with 81 percent of participants in agreement that media attention, which highlights and dramatizes negative situations and ignores the successes of schools, leads to poor teacher morale" (p. 97). A reduction in teachers' morale may affect teaching and school operations, because disengaged teachers are likely to withdraw participation and withhold contributions. Teacher discontent has the potential to infiltrate to classroom, school, and community (Mackenzie, 2007; Tsai et al., 2006).

A group of studies reports that increasing departmental or system matters had contributed to teachers' distress. Industrial conditions (e.g., salary and hours of work) (Dinham, 2000; Ebbeck & Waniganayake, 2003; Galton & MacBeath, 2008; Nias, 1989; Tsai et al., 2006) and relentless curriculum changes and reforms (Galton & MacBeath, 2008) left teachers feeling disheartened. Internationally, it has been acknowledged that excessive work hours leave teachers feeling stressed and

suffering from burnout (Easthope & Easthope, 2000; Galton et al., 2002; Galton & MacBeath, 2008, 2010; Tsai et al., 2006).

Williamson and Myhill (2008) report “that [in Tasmania] female teachers are five times more dissatisfied than male teachers about working ‘out of hours’” (p. 31).

Ballet and Kelchtermans (2009) support this finding and state that “the ongoing struggle experienced by (especially female) teachers between their professional commitment and their responsibility to family” to achieve a work life balance sees primary teachers compromise to gain a “sense of control and balance” (p. 1155).

Higher levels of discontent such as those reported by female teachers may contribute to the rise in part-time employment (DoE, 2010a; Wilhelm et al., 2010) and shared teaching arrangements.

Generally, at a school level, increased administration, “pressure from another person (work or otherwise) [and] misbehaviour from students” (Wilhelm et al., 2010, p. 302) has increased teachers’ dissatisfaction with teaching. A changing society has created a divide between teachers and parents. To cite an instance, in their study, Galton and MacBeath (2008) revealed that relationships with parents “involved a lot of extra time, not only in face-to-face meetings but in telephoning, writing reports and liaising with psychological and social services” (p. 77). In the past, parents tended to support teachers whereas today parents are more likely to ‘side with’ students (MacBeath et al., 2004). While this type of practice undermines teachers, both personally and professionally (Stormont, Espinosa, Knipping & McCathren, 2003), it also influences teacher productivity, and wellness (Brown et al., 2002), and is accentuated by increased class sizes.

Class size.

In the literature reviewed, opinions about class size were divided, with some writers contending that if Kindergarten students are taught by highly proficient teachers, then class sizes are not a problem (Milesi & Gamoran, 2006). For example, an American study showed that class size is “insignificant for students from different race/ethnic, economic and academic backgrounds” (Milesi & Gamoran, 2006, p. 287). However, it has been suggested that smaller sized ECE /elementary classrooms situated in low socio-economic or disadvantaged communities have had a positive impact on student achievements and learning outcomes (Barnett, Schulman & Shore, 2004; Graue, Hatch, Rao & Oen, 2007). Blatchford, Russell, Bassett, Brown and Martin (2007) investigated the impact of class size on teaching British students aged 7-11 years. These authors found that teacher student interactions and individual attention were more frequent and increased opportunities for curriculum differentiation were apparent in smaller sized classes.

Tasmanian EC teachers involved in this study are members of an ‘ageing’ profession (Gardner & Williamson, 2004), and are representative of teachers employed across various socio-economic school communities, hence their perceptions of class size are worthy of examination, given that the broader literature on class size is somewhat inconclusive. Thus, it is useful to consider Tasmanian EC teachers’ perceptions of class size in relation to teaching and young children’s learning and outcomes.

2.5 The Effects of Change Upon Teachers and their Work Lives

Day and Gu (2010) reported that, as society is rapidly changing and teachers try to keep pace with change, effects upon teachers and their work lives have been negative. In a review of the literature, sourced from over the past decade, it was

found that three issues have impacted upon teachers and their work. Firstly, pressures surrounding increased workload were revealed in a number of studies (Day et al., 2006; Easthope & Easthope, 2000; Galton & MacBeath, 2008; Gardner & Williamson, 2004; Kilgallon et al., 2008; Kyriacou & Kunc, 2007; Noble & Macfarlane, 2005). Secondly, time was seen as a significant issue for teachers. Many teachers report having insufficient time to complete the required responsibilities (Acker, 1999; Aratò & Szenerszky, 2004; Booyse & Swanepoel, 2004; Hargreaves, 2003; Poppleton & Williamson, 2004; Tsai et al., 2006). Thirdly, aspects surrounding teachers' ability to solve student based problems, owing to the lack of resources, has led to feelings of powerlessness being experienced by teachers (Burchielli & Bartram, 2006). Each of these issues is discussed in greater depth in the following sections.

Work overload.

In Tasmania, AEU awards and conditions include specifically that full-time teachers must be onsite in schools for 35 hours per week, and are not expected to work outside the hours stipulated, either during weekends or on gazetted public holidays (Australian Education Union Tasmania, 2011). The recent release of the *State of our Schools [SOS report] Survey 2010* (Australian Education Union [AEU], 2010, p. 13) reported 29 percent of Tasmanian teachers typically work between 46-50 hours per week on school-related activities. Just over half of these respondents (55%) agreed with national trends, which reported that, since 2009, time spent by Australian teachers on school-related activities had increased (AEU, 2010).

Similar findings were reported in a study commissioned by the National Union for Teachers (NUT), conducted by Galton et al. (2002), which examined primary

teachers' workloads. The study involved "102 schools, discussions with national and local bodies and a benchmarking of teachers' hours against other UK occupations and against overseas teachers" (Galton & MacBeath, 2010, p. 303). These authors noted primary teachers work "around 52 hours each week ... compared with around 45 hours for managers and professionals in other occupations across the UK" (Galton et al., 2002, p. 13).

A subsequent study undertaken 4 years later, by Galton and MacBeath (2010), found that when compared with the 2002 survey, primary teachers' work hours had increased from "just over 54 hours per week to 56 hours" (p. 305). Gardner and Williamson (2004), investigating Tasmanian primary and secondary teacher workloads, report that teachers generally worked "between 40-49 hours during the week", and "recorded weekend hours ranging between 3.5 hours and 5.2 hours" (pp. 21-22). Tasks that teachers "perceived as being major components of their roles" were completed outside work hours (Gardner & Williamson, 2004, p. 22).

Research has revealed that as well as spending time at home on teacher-related activities teachers are also spending longer hours on site (Day et al., 2006; Galton et al., 2002; Galton & MacBeath, 2010). Although primary and EC teachers' perceptions are represented in these studies, the separation between primary and EC teachers' working hours is not articulated in the data. The findings from these studies indicate that teachers' workloads have intensified across the western world (Hargreaves, 1994).

Increased teaching-related tasks.

Acker (1999) confirms that teaching "preparation and professional development (including staff-meetings) ... [have] soared" (p. 69). In Hungary, Arató and

Szenerszky (2004) showed that “almost 50% of the teachers [in their cross-cultural study] declared a need for more classroom preparation time” (p. 132). These findings concur with other studies (e.g., Booyse & Swanepoel, 2004; Galton et al., 2002; Gardner & Williamson, 2004), which have reported that over the last two decades, globally, administration and teaching related tasks have significantly increased (Galton & MacBeath, 2010). When teachers are obliged to accommodate unrealistic expectations they tend to suffer from work overload (Fullan & Hargreaves, 1991). Increased preparation, planning, and administrative responsibilities have governed teachers’ work lives and dominated their time.

Time and related issues.

Hargreaves (2003) stated that “time is perennially a problem for teachers, and few teachers will ever concede they have enough time in their workday” (p. 104). In Tasmania, all teachers receive a weekly allocation of non-teaching, or non-contact time during the school day, which is provided when specialist teachers supervise class groups. This time allocation provides classroom teachers with an opportunity to do other teaching related tasks without having the direct responsibility for a class group. Non-contact time is, however, only available to teachers if the school has the “right” number of student enrolments, and hence can employ specialists, and thus decisions about non-contact time are at the discretion of the principal.

In other Australian states, such as Queensland, teachers working in primary, special, and EC classrooms receive “no less than two hours of rostered non-contact time” per week (Department of Education, Training and Employment, Queensland, 2011). At the time of writing, in Tasmania, formal agreements confirming teachers’ entitlements regarding non-contact time were yet to be established. Without

mandates which stipulate the amount of non-contact time teachers should be entitled to receive, teachers report spending a number of extra hours on teaching related tasks. Day et al. (2006) previously stated that teaching had become so demanding that it intrudes upon all aspects of life, leaving teachers with little time for personal interests and activities.

Teacher stress.

Kryiacou (2001) defines teacher stress as any work related experience which is “unpleasant” and gives rise to negative emotions, such as “anger, anxiety, tension, frustration or depression” (p. 28). Writers (e.g., Adams, 2001; Kryiacou, 2001; Tsai et al., Wilhelm et al., 2000) reported that in many countries teaching is recognised as being highly stressful (Brown et al., 2002), with the causes of teacher stress being varied and complex.

In Australia, as in other countries, teacher stress and burnout are serious concerns for employers, school systems, communities, teachers and their families. Of the published research, most studies were conducted in secondary schools (Adams, 2001; Easthope & Easthope, 2007), primary schools (Brown et al., 2002) or as a combination of both sectors (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2009) and in other educational contexts (Kryiacou, 2001; Van Dick & Wagner, 2001; Wilhelm et al., 2000). In comparison, until recently (e.g., Klassen & Chiu, 2010; McGrath & Huntington, 2007; Nobel & Macfarlane, 2005; Tsai, Fung & Chow, 2006), few studies had examined EC teacher stress and burnout. Perhaps the shortfall in ECE specific research may be attributed to EC teachers’ perceptions having been included in the primary or elementary literature (e.g., Klassen & Chiu, 2010). In addition, Brown et al. (2002) observed that, often, literature incorporates the topic of stress in

conjunction with other interrelated aspects, namely teacher satisfaction, dissatisfaction, commitment, morale, and motivation, rather than as a separate issue. Just as there are different ways of reporting teacher stress, there are differences in what constitutes teacher stress.

The most common sources of teacher stress identified within the literature involved teacher relations with students, colleagues, parents and the wider community, student attitudes and inappropriate behaviours, time spent on teaching related activities, change, teaching environments and work conditions (Brown et al., 2002; Galton & MacBeath, 2008; Howard & Johnson, 2004; McGrath & Huntington, 2007; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2009; Tarren-Sweeney, Hazell, Vimpani, Keatinge & Callan, 2002; Tsai et al., 2006; Wilhelm et al., 2000). Tsai et al. (2006) suggest that, “just as the sources of stress can vary between individuals, responses to stressful experiences also differ” (p. 365).

Australian researchers, such as Howard and Johnson (2004), have examined the resilience of educators teaching in highly disadvantaged schools, where issues of “unemployment, poverty, family breakdown and interpersonal violence [were] common” (p. 405). These authors found that resilient teachers were creative problem solvers, effective communicators, self-protective, flexible, and had developed a repertoire of strategies for coping with stressful experiences (Howard & Johnson, 2004). Other studies have reported similar findings (Kryiacou, 2001; Tsai et al., 2006), adding that supportive colleagues and teaching environments help to reduce teacher stress (Easthope & Easthope, 2007). In Tasmania, teachers are reported to be members of an ‘ageing’ profession (Gardner & Williamson, 2004), an interesting phenomena given that stress and burnout are common health related issues among teachers. Arguably, EC teachers involved in this study may possess coping strategies

reported in other studies (Howard & Johnson, 2004; Kryiacou, 2001; Tsai et al., 2006).

2.6 Summary of Chapter 2

This chapter has presented a discussion of the literature in relation to EC teachers' perceptions of change, teaching, and the effects these aspects have upon teachers and their work. The chapter commenced with a rationale for ECE research and discussed ECE contexts and terminology. Section 2.3 reported the effects of societal, educational, technological, and curriculum changes. Further, aspects reported in the literature which affect teaching satisfaction were presented. Lastly, Section 2.5 discussed the literature in relation to how the issues reported affect teachers and their work lives. In the next chapter, the methods adopted in this study are discussed, providing an indication of how this was used to develop an understanding of change in relation to EC teachers and their work.

Chapter 3

Methods

The purpose of this study was to provide insights into EC teachers' perceptions of teaching, in terms of the impact of change. This chapter presents a comprehensive account of the methods, research procedures, and data analysis processes. An overview of the conceptual framework of analysis is presented with links to the research questions, data sources and domains.

3.1 Selection of the Research Approach

In this study, two types of data, quantitative and qualitative, were sought to address each of the four research questions; thus defining this research as a mixed methods study (Creswell, Plano Clark & Garrett, 2008). The research questions guiding this study were:

RQ1: What change-related factors do EC teachers perceive as having had the most impact upon them and their work?

RQ2: What are teachers' perceptions regarding the highlights of teaching in EC classrooms?

RQ3: What are EC teachers' perceptions regarding the downsides of teaching?

RQ4: *In what ways do the issues reported by EC teachers impact upon them and their work?*

Mixed or multiple methods research, as it is sometimes referred to, has the potential to “bring greater sophistication to our understanding of social phenomena ..., it can reach out across divisions in the research community ..., and it can strengthen the methodological armoury of researchers when they apply social science to real-world social problems” (Fielding, 2008, p. 51).

In this study the methodology adopted was determined after due consideration of the nature of the phenomena under investigation, the study population, and the research context (Creswell et al., 2008; Nardi, 2003). Using two different research paradigms enabled the researcher to use quantitative data to ascertain participants’ demographics, gender, class size, grade level, and the frequencies of agreement to a set of predetermined questionnaire statements. Questionnaire and focus group interviews were seen to be complementary, enabling insights to be obtained from EC teachers which otherwise may not have been forthcoming (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003). Furthermore, focus group interviews provided the researcher with an opportunity to investigate points arising from preliminary analysis of questionnaire data. Focus group interview questions were derived from the questionnaire data, providing additional clarification, explanation and information. The use of interview questions developed from questionnaire responses was a strategy that was seen as beneficial to the research because it allowed qualitative data (teachers’ voices) and quantitative data (questionnaire responses) to be integrated easily. These methods were seen to be valuable, as they allowed the research questions to be addressed in a more comprehensive manner (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003). Thus, in this study

mixed methods were deemed the best approach to investigate EC teachers' perceptions of teaching.

One of the problems of using a mixed methods approach is the challenge of the researcher needing to be familiar with and an expert in using both research paradigms effectively (Gay, Mills & Airasian, 2009). This limitation was alleviated with the assistance of two supervisors, each with expertise and skills in a different research mode.

A modified socio-cultural approach.

Bronfenbrenner's (1976) ecological model was initially considered an appropriate conceptual framework on which to base the study. "Systems" theory is based on the premise that an individual's immediate context is affected by broader social, economic and political structural influences. After preliminary readings and data analysis, however, it became apparent that a more direct focus of analysis was required (Wellington, 2000) in this study to examine Tasmanian EC teachers' perceptions of teaching, the impact of change, and how these aspects related to teachers' practice and work lives. As a consequence an investigation was conducted to find other models which might complement Bronfenbrenner's six inter-related systems framework.

Australian EC authors (e.g., Anning et al., 2009; Fler & Richardson, 2004; Fler et al., 2006; Keesing-Styles & Hedges, 2007) have shown how "observations and interpretations can be framed using [Rogoff's] three lenses; personal, interpersonal, and contextual and institutional" as a focus for analysis for student learning (McLachlan, Fler & Edwards, 2010, p. 101). In their model, Fler and Richardson (2004) observe the interactions between the child; the child and others (peers, adults,

or educators); and between the child and the context (for e.g., resources and learning materials). Documentations are analysed and used to inform subsequent teaching and learning. In the socio-cultural model other ‘systems’ external to the child do not inform the observations.

In this study, both Bronfenbrenner’s ecological framework (1976) and Fler and Richardson’s (2004) socio-cultural models were used as the basis for developing a conceptual framework for data analyses, reporting, and presentation.

Bronfenbrenner’s macro system and the direct focus of analysis evident in Fler and Richardson’s socio-cultural model saw three domains emerge: EC Teachers as Practitioners; EC Teachers as Professionals, and Contextual Aspects of EC Teaching (Yost & Williamson, 2010b). The relationship between the domains is represented in Figure 3.1.

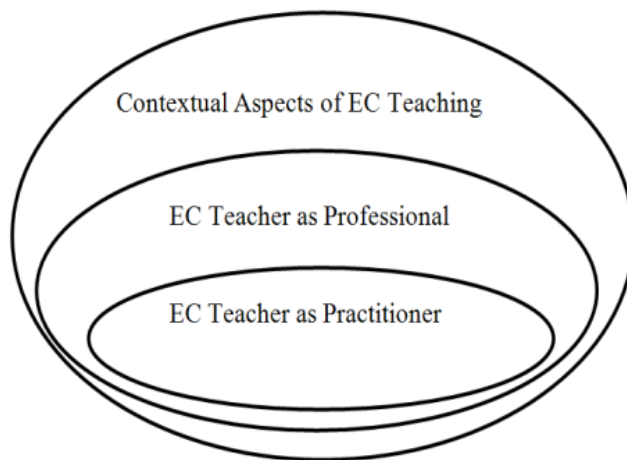


Figure 3.1 Relationships between the three lenses.

The conceptual framework enabled data to be classified into domains, categories, and subcategories. As the researcher I analysed participants’ qualitative and quantitative data (Gay et al., 2009).

3.2 Ethical Considerations

Section 3.2 addresses the ethical considerations associated with undertaking this study; the role of the researcher and the processes for gaining permission to conduct the research are presented.

Varied roles of the researcher.

Thomas (2003) stated “until recent decades, a typical ambition of most researchers was to discover objective *truth* (emphasis in original) about events—truth unaffected by the investigator’s personal interests, beliefs, and values” (p. 75). As the researcher was a former EC teacher, participants may have perceived my prior experiences and presence to “have a direct effect on the research design, findings and interpretations of the study” (Lankshear & Knobel, 2004, p. 74). To reduce the potential for researcher bias, the questionnaire statements were designed to be unambiguous, interviewees were given opportunity to clarify their responses once data analysis was completed, and the results were further analysed in consultation with two independent EC professionals to ensure an accurate representation.

Gaining permission to conduct research.

One of the most important aspects in social science research relates to the processes of seeking and obtaining ethical approval to conduct studies (Burns, 2000). Thus, prior to commencement of the project, ethical approval was sought from the Human Research Ethics Committee (Tasmania) Network and permission to conduct the research was obtained from Department of Education Office of Educational Review (Tasmania) (see Appendix A).

Upon receiving approval from both the Ethics committee and the DoE, principals were sent a letter (see Appendix B), and a copy of the teachers' information package. The package contained a copy of the Teachers' Information letter (see Appendix C), EC Teacher Questionnaire (see Appendix D), and a sample of the EC Teacher Interview Consent Form (see Appendix E).

Shortly after the documents were posted to principals, meetings were arranged with each principal to discuss the nature of the study and to hand deliver the EC teacher information packages. Having the EC teacher information packages distributed by a third party to teachers using staff internal mail boxes ensured participants' anonymity was upheld (Lankshear & Knobel, 2004).

The questionnaire did not ask for any information that could identify participants (Nardi, 2003) and the provision of two self-addressed reply paid envelopes protected respondents' anonymity. Self return envelopes permitted participants to: (i) give consent to be involved in the study; (ii) complete the questionnaire in their own time; and (iii) report their views anonymously (Burns, 2000; Lankshear & Knobel, 2004) without any influence or coercion from any other party, such as the researcher, principal and/or other colleagues.

In this study, two reply paid self-addressed envelopes were provided by the researcher. The first envelope allowed EC teachers to anonymously return their completed questionnaire (see Appendix D) and the second, enabled interested teachers to return a completed signed EC Teacher Interview Consent Form (see Appendix E). The return of signed interview consent forms by respondents indicated to the researcher that participants had understood the implications, and were aware of the responsibilities, associated with being a participant in the interview process.

It is not possible to guarantee anonymity for focus group interviewees. Rather, confidentiality for interviewees was sought by asking attendees to keep other members' identities and opinions shared in confidence, whilst pointing out that the researcher could not guarantee that participants would heed this request (Roberts-Holmes, 2005). Further, anonymity for data reported was assured, and provided by presenting the findings using alphanumerical codes, thereby eliminating the likelihood of participant identification (Burns, 2000).

As shown in Table 3.1 codes comprised a letter or letters to represent the educational district and a number to indicate the order of questionnaire returns (e.g., A1 represents the Arthur educational district and 1 indicates the questionnaire number). Interview data were coded using a similar style, for example in the code M1/17, the letter M represents the interview site, the number 1 stands for the first teacher/interviewee to introduce him/herself, and lastly, following the forward slash, the transcript citations page numbers were added to the codes, thus 17 referred to page 17 of that interview transcript.

To achieve participants' anonymity the interview sites and ENI (2007, see Glossary) ratings for each participating school have been withheld, and pseudonyms have been provided and used throughout the thesis to protect the identity of both schools and, hence, teachers involved in this study.

Table 3.1
Questionnaire and Interview Coding

Location	Data Gathering Methods	
Districts	Questionnaire Returns	
Arthur	A1 – A6	
Barrington	BA1 – BA13	
Bowen	BO1 – BO12	
Derwent	D1 – D5	
Esk	E1 – E12	
Hartz	H1 – H17	
Interview Sites	Group Interview No./Speaker	Interview Transcript Page No.
Monte Carlo	M1 and M2	1 – 17
Mumbrilla	MB1 – MB4	1 – 16
North Top	N1 and N2	1 – 10
Springmeadows	S1 and S2	1 – 13
Treetop	T1 – T3	1 – 18
Westaway	W1 and W2	1 – 19

3.3 Study Sample

In this study, the population group of interest to the researcher was representative of EC teachers currently teaching in Tasmanian DoE EC classrooms (Burns, 2000). It was not feasible to survey all Tasmanian EC teachers, hence a sample of Kindergarten – Grade 2 teachers was sought.

Sample size.

Sample size was an important consideration given the potential for non-response from questionnaires (Sue & Ritter, 2007). Lankshear and Knobel (2004) suggested that the participants who are selected should, “in all important respects, be just like the ones who were not selected” (p. 147). For this reason EC teachers invited to be involved in this study were, as shown in Table 3.2, drawn from the three regions of Tasmania, incorporating six educational districts, with five Tasmanian DoE schools representative of differing socio-economic status being selected from each district. Thus, EC teachers from a total of 28 schools were involved in this study.

Table 3.2
Sample Questionnaire

Region	Educational District	Questionnaire Distribution	Questionnaire Return	Gender Female	Male
North	Esk	31	12	12	
North-West	Arthur	19	6	5	1
	Barrington	23	13	12	1
South	Bowen	31	12	12	
	Derwent	19	5	5	
	Hartz	35	17	17	
	TOTAL	158	65	63	2
			(41.13%)	(96.9%)	(3.1%)

Schools were selected using the annually produced ENI (2007) rating system published by the Tasmanian DoE, and using school postal codes. The ENI which is based on the gross income of school community members assisted the author to identify schools from a range of socio-economic contexts. The higher the level of indexation rating a school receives, the higher the probability that the school community will be comprised of students from impoverished or materially and educationally disadvantaged backgrounds.

In addition, within each educational district, postal codes were used to determine school locations. Schools with similar postal codes were selected to minimise any potential inconvenience to attendees at focus groups. With the exception of two focus group interviews which comprised teachers from neighbouring schools, EC teachers who attended the focus group interviews were teaching in the same school, as teaching colleagues participants knew each other. In this study, 30 schools were selected and invited to participate. Of these, 28 schools participated. The recorded ENI scores ranged from a rating of 22.62 to a rating of 84.64 which meant that schools that consented to be involved in this study, and teachers' perceptions, were gathered from a cross-section of socio-economic (SEN) communities.

As well as school SEN, school location and teaching backgrounds are important because of the potential to capture a wide range of teacher perceptions and experiences. Fler et al. (2006) recognised the importance of context in EC settings. Teaching in a rural school is a vastly different experience to working in an urban school (Galton & MacBeath, 2008; MacBeath et al., 2004). Further, teachers' attitudes and perceptions vary according to their effectiveness and experience.

Arguably it takes a teacher between 5 to 7 years to acquire high levels of teaching skills and competence (Berliner, 2004). Further, teachers' views vary according to their years of experience (Wallace, 2010), thus in this study teachers' backgrounds (Section 1) were categorised into seven year stages (Item 3).

As shown in Table 3.3, of the total respondents (n=65), fifteen (15) of these EC teachers each participated in one of the six focus group interviews conducted across the three state regions.

Table 3.3
Sample Focus Group Interviews

Region	Educational	Focus Group	Number	Gender	
	District	Interview Number	of Attendees	Female	Male
South	Bowen &				
	Hartz	1	2	2	
North-West	Arthur	2	2	1	1
	Barrington	3	2	1	1
North	Esk	4	2	2	
		5	4	4	
		6	3	3	
				13	
TOTAL			15	(86.6%)	2 (13.4%)

Overall, 158 questionnaires were distributed, and of these 65 questionnaires were returned, representing a 41.13 percent response rate. In total, 96.9 percent of questionnaires were completed by female teachers, and 86.6 percent of interview

attendees were also female, hence the sample population were mostly female teachers, and representative of the Tasmanian DoE EC teaching cohort (DoE, 2010a).

3.4 Study Time Line

Table 3.4 presents the time line for the design, data collection and analysis phases of the study.

Table 3.4
Study Time Line

Phases	2007 July - Dec	2008 Jan - June	Dec	2009 Jan - Dec	2010 Jan - Dec
• Phase 1 Design	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lit review • Study design • Ethics approval • Pilot testing questionnaire • Modification 				
• Phase 2 Data Collection		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Questionnaire • *FGI schedule • Pilot testing schedule • Modification of schedule 	• *FGIs		
• Phase 3 Data Analysis		• Questionnaire		• *FGI	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complete data analysis • Report for EC teachers

*FGI = Focus Group Interviews

Pilot testing the instruments.

Prior to the commencement of data collection, pilot testing of the instruments was undertaken to determine whether or not the instruments would obtain data that could provide answers to the research questions (Burns, 2000), and to ensure clarity of

questions and response formats. Three EC teachers, two females and one male teacher with varying years of teaching experience volunteered to pilot the instruments. Ensuring the teachers were representative of the sample population was important to ensure the instruments would be interpreted in similar ways. Data collected from the pilot studies were not included in the study, because these pilot study participants were not teaching in the DoE schools selected and, further, their participation was sought as a way to check the data collection instruments, which were subsequently modified slightly.

As a result of feedback from the pilot study participants, page breaks were added in the questionnaire between the sections, and check boxes inserted. Both modifications enhanced the presentation of the questionnaire. Secondly, during the interview trial, the importance of the interviewer “stating briefly the purpose of the interview ... without giving too much information about the study which could bias the respondent” was reaffirmed (Burns, 2000, p. 582).

3.5 Data Collection Instruments

The aim of the study was to investigate EC teachers perceptions of teaching in Tasmanian DoE schools. To examine this phenomenon, two data collection instruments were used, namely, a questionnaire and focus group interviews.

To add depth and to allow greater understanding of the data obtained from the questionnaire responses, it was decided that a number of focus group interviews would be undertaken. “Focus group interviews could provide information about a range of ideas and feelings that individuals have about certain issues, as well as illuminating the differences between groups of individuals” (Rabiee, 2004, p. 656). Freebody (2003) stated that “most approaches to interviewing in educational research

draw a distinction based on the degree of latitude given the interviewees” (p. 133).

For the purposes of this study, semi-structured interviews were adopted because they “begin with a predetermined set of questions, but allow some latitude in the breadth of relevance” (Freebody, 2003, p. 133). Further, “focus group interviews are useful when researchers want to shed light on quantitative data already collected” (Krueger & Casey, 2000, p. 24), as was the case in this study.

Questionnaires.

The questionnaire (see Appendix D) included a variety of question types. For example, closed questions were used to gather factual responses related to respondent’s gender, teaching qualifications, years of teaching experience, class size, and grade level, and open-ended questions were used to ascertain respondent’s opinions and perceptions. Scaled items were included to gain an understanding of teacher’s agreement levels with statements relating to their teaching practice.

There were six sections and 30 items in the questionnaire. Sections 1 and 2 comprised closed questions concerning teachers’ demographics, namely, qualifications, years of experience, gender, and teaching context (Items 1 – 5 inclusive); Sections 3 and 4 comprised a total of 17 Likert-type items (Items 6 – 22 inclusive.) which allowed teachers to indicate the extent of their agreement on 4 point scales. These items derived from research (see Brown, Ralph & Brember, 2002) and, as a former EC teacher, my perceptions of change (see above RQ1). Section 5 included nine items about the amount of time teachers spend on teaching related tasks (see RQ4), and Section 6 sought respondents’ perceptions of job satisfaction (see RQs 2 and 3) using two open-ended questions (Items 29 and 30) asking about the highlights and downsides of EC teaching. Highlights are defined as

aspects which are prominent, of major significance, whereas downsides are discouraging or negative aspects (Merriam-Webster, 2011). The terms highlights and downsides were selected because they were seen to be relevant for participants and would best epitomise the nature of teachers' work.

The closed questions in Sections 1 and 2 were intentionally straightforward and designed to lead the respondent further into the questionnaire (Burns, 2000). The Likert-type scales used for items in Sections 3, 4, and 5 ranged from 1-strongly agree to 4-strongly disagree. A neutral response or "undecided" option was not provided, in order to prevent respondents "fence-sitting" (Tuckman, 1994, p. 234). Other authors (e.g., Schme & Oppenlander, 2010) suggest that to "force an opinion generates artificial choices" (p. 28). Irrespective of whether a neutral response is provided, however, respondents who are undecided may decline to provide a response for other reasons, which might include the wording of the statement. In this study, this was not an issue as respondents were also provided with the open-ended statements which provided an opportunity to report or elaborate on pertinent issues.

The open-ended questions in Section 6 were designed to collect additional data (Weirsmas & Jurs, 2005) about issues that EC teachers perceived to be important or worthy of further comment (Burns, 2000). Open-ended items were worded to be neutral (Gay et al., 2009), and provided a basis for constructing the interview schedule.

Focus group interviews.

The focus group interviews were a secondary data source which provided participants with an opportunity to discuss, rather than write, their perceptions in an informal, non-threatening environment (Burns, 2000). In this study, semi-structured

interviews were considered most appropriate for adding depth to quantitative data, whilst respecting interviewees' need to discuss issues of relevance. Prompts and supplementary interview questions were provided by the interviewer as a way to probe more deeply the themes being examined. It was recognised that rich data can only be generated if interviewees engage fully in the discussion (Krueger & Casey, 2000).

Opinions regarding the size of interview groups vary. Vaughn, Schumm and Sinagub (1996) recommended that focus group interviews comprise between 8 and 10 participants. However, Wellington (2000) stated that focus group interviews are most effective with participants in "groups of three or four" (p. 81). In this small scale study, given the busy time of year (1st – 15th December) interview groups ranged in size from between two to four participants, with the majority of group interviews (n=4) involving two participants. Smaller groups were practical as a result of the geographic dispersal of participants, but also had the advantage of decreasing the likelihood that some participants would monopolise the group discussions (Gay et al. 2009). In this study, "all participants were willing to have their say" and share views by taking turns (p. 372).

Rabiee (2004) suggested that one of the potential problems for focus group interviews is "the number of non-attendees" (p. 656). In order to maximise attendance, interviews were planned well in advance and, a few days prior to the interview, telephone contact with the school reconfirmed the time and venue. In this study, non-attendance was not a major issue, although one interview was conducted with only two EC teachers, due to a third teacher's absence. A subsequent conversation revealed that the teacher had "forgotten" the interview. She declined an offer to attend a subsequent interview round.

3.6 Data Generation Processes

There are a variety of types of questionnaires, including paper-based, email and online versions. In this study, paper based questionnaires were selected because participants' anonymity was preserved (Sue & Ritter, 2007).

Questionnaire distribution.

In Tasmania, teachers employed in DoE schools each have an email account.

Nevertheless, as Sue and Ritter (2007) suggest, there are still some teachers who are reluctant to complete an online survey questionnaire. The other concern arising from online survey questionnaires was in relation to participants' reluctance to be involved in an online study, because of limited technological skills (Gay et al., 2009). These aspects were seen to increase the likelihood of a low response rate (Burns, 2000).

Paper-based questionnaires were seen to be user-friendly, in terms of access, usage, and return. After due consideration, a self-completion paper-based questionnaire was selected as the most useful way to collect data from EC teachers. Furthermore, to maximise the response rate follow-up reminders (see Appendix F), using a typed letter on university letterhead, were sent to participants (Burns, 2000). The letter also conveyed appreciation for those who had already completed and returned questionnaires. Likewise a letter was sent to each principal to acknowledge his/her support (see Appendix G).

Questionnaires were printed on coloured paper, as indicated in Table 3.5, allowing educational districts, and hence state regions to be identified upon return.

Table 3.5
Questionnaire Colour Coding

Questionnaire Colour	Educational District	State Region
Light mauve	Arthur	North-West
White	Barrington	
Lemon	Hartz	
Light green	Bowen	South
Light pink	Derwent	
Gold	Esk	North

The returned questionnaires were sorted by educational districts, assigned a reference number from 1-65, and raw data were coded and entered into an Excel spreadsheet and saved onto a password-protected computer using the University server, which has an automatic backing up of files. Hard copies of questionnaires were stored in a locked filing cabinet in the Faculty of Education at the University of Tasmania. Of the questionnaires (n=158) hand delivered by the researcher to each school, 65 were returned, a 41.13 percent return rate.

Focus group interviews.

Of the 65 EC teachers who returned questionnaires, 15 participants (9.5%) attended one of 6 small group focus interviews. The geographic distribution of interview participants was presented in Table 3.3.

Interviews complemented the questionnaire because unlike questionnaires, interviews provided participants with an opportunity to clarify the interview questions if they were unclear, and enabled interviewees to provide ‘new’ data not previously addressed in the questionnaire. Another advantage of interview was the potential for teachers to “bounce” ideas off other group members (Lankshear & Knobel, 2004, p. 208). While considered an advantage, there are risks associated with conducting group interviews, for example one participant may tend to dominate

the group discussion. Further, information may be withheld or discussion may deviate (Burns, 2000), or respondents may choose not to participate for fear of embarrassment or ridicule (Burns, 2000). These aspects were minimised by (i) providing a relaxed atmosphere which included the provision of afternoon tea, (ii) using an interview schedule, (iii) recording dialogue with a small unobtrusive voice recorder, and (iv), monitoring non-verbal cues. Being aware of potential problems meant the benefits of focus group interviews outweighed the limitations.

Organising and conducting the focus group interviews.

Teachers' interview letters of consent were grouped according to school and proximity to other consenting group members, and then each school was telephoned to make an appointment for interview. Following discussion with members, the focus group interview time and venue were confirmed, and invitations (see Appendix H) to attend a group interview were emailed (see Appendix I) using the email address teachers had provided on individual consent forms. Interviews on school sites were usually conducted in a café, an office, or a vacant class room.

The order in which the focus group interview were conducted, region, educational district, number of attendees, and teacher gender are shown in Table 3.3. Interviews were conducted between the 1st and 15th December, 2008, during Term 3 of the school year. One of the advantages of the scheduling of interviews was the timing (Mertens, 2010). Although interviewees were busy with end-of-year school festivities, teachers had completed administrative tasks associated with the end of the school year, which included student assessment and reporting. All interviews were conducted after school hours and kept to a maximum, 1-hour duration.

Interviews were conducted between 3:45 – 4:45 p.m., thereby avoiding timetable dilemmas, and clashes with teaching duties (Lankshear & Knobel, 2004) or other personal commitments. Although no interviews were deferred, the researcher was mindful of respondents' non-verbal cues and was prepared to terminate an interview, or reconvene, if necessary. In all instances, monitoring of time, refocussing interviewees, and pacing ensured focus group interviews were conducted within the hour allocated.

Interview schedule.

In focus group interviews, a schedule (see Appendix J) was developed for the focus group interviews to ensure there was consistency between questions, sequence, content, language, and meaning of questions. Focus group interviews commenced with a welcome, an outline of the aim of the interview, a self-introduction by the researcher, describing her previous role as an EC teacher, and teacher's self-introductions. Self-introductions contributed to a relaxed environment, and, starting with a non-intimidating question as suggested by Wellington (2000) ensured participants were willing to engage with the researcher. Questions such as "Can you share with the group your reasons for becoming an EC teacher?" helped participants to feel comfortable and served the purpose of stimulating interviewee responses by placing respondents at ease with the researcher and interview process (Lankshear & Knobel, 2004).

Recording and transcribing focus group interviews.

Interview data were recorded with interviewees' permission. In interview research the use of voice recorders is frequently debated, with most of the criticism directed at the recorders' presence and its influence upon attendees. However, the interview

process is contrived (Kelly, 2004). Nevertheless, in this study the selection of small voice recorders ensured these devices were relatively inconspicuous and operational noise emissions low, thereby their minimising intrusion.

The advantages of using a voice recorder outweighed the limitations, and allowed the researcher to obtain an accurate and complete record of what was spoken (Gay, 1996). Two small-sized audio-voice recorders were selected to capture the interview conversations. One of the voice recorders was digital, a ‘back-up’ which had an inbuilt microphone and the second used tapes which were later transcribed verbatim into a Microsoft Word document.

Another distinct advantage of using the digital voice recorders was the ease of data “download”, and subsequent storage of voice files. A research assistant transcribed taped interview data which were saved using a Microsoft Word document, and were stored on a password protected computer. Teachers were assured that, at the end of the study, data files would be deleted and all hard copies of transcripts shredded and placed in a secure package for disposal.

In accordance with Lankshear and Knobel’s (2004) recommendation to preserve the “question and answer nature of the exchange” between focus group members and the researcher, the spoken language was transcribed as “dialogue” (p. 267). The identities of the interviewees were protected using an alphanumerical code as discussed previously in Section 3.3 and shown in Table 3.1.

Kvale (2007) states that researchers have multiple options for coding research interview transcriptions. In this study, retaining the context of dialogue was deemed important to avoid the potential for misinterpretation. However, Wolcott (1994) argues that one should “edit words as necessary to help readers read and to put

informants in the best possible light” (p. 66). Consequently non-standard English was corrected.

3.7 Data Analysis

The purpose of analysing data “is to find meaning in the data, and this is done by systematically arranging and presenting the information” (Burns, 2000, p. 430). To assist with the volume of data obtained, computer programs (namely Microsoft Word, Windows Media Audio (WMA) and Microsoft Excel) were used to assist with the “mechanical duties of organising data” (Vaughan, Schumm & Sinagub, 1996, p. 113).

Analytical conceptual framework.

Using three lenses, modified from Rogoff’s model and described in Section 3.1, data were coded into the three domains: EC Teachers as Practitioners; EC Teachers as Professionals; and Contextual Aspects of EC Teaching (Yost & Williamson, 2010b). From within each of the domains, key coding categories and subcategories emerged and are presented in Table 3.6. As Lankshear and Knobel (2004) explain, “initial codes were useful, but certainly not exhaustive” and this was certainly the case in this study (p. 277).

The conceptual framework of analysis in which each research question is presented, and the links to data sources, domains, and emergent themes shown is provided in Table 3.6.

Table 3.6

Framework of Analysis: Links to Questionnaire, Interview Items, Domains and Categories

Research Questions	Data Sources	Domains	Categories
Study Sample	QS 1 and 2 FGI Self introductions	EC teachers as practitioners	Gender; Teaching Specialisation; Years of experience; Class size and grade level.
RQ1: What change-related factors do EC teachers perceive as having had the most impact upon them and their work?	QS 3 FGI 3 and 4	EC teachers as practitioners	(i) Changes in family (ii) Student diversity (iii) Curriculum changes
RQ2: What are teachers' perceptions regarding the highlights of teaching in EC classrooms?	QS 1 and 2 FGI 1 and 2	EC teachers as practitioners EC teachers as professionals	(i) Satisfaction from teaching (ii) Positive relationships (iii) Receiving recognition and acknowledgement
RQ3: What are EC teachers' perceptions regarding the downsides of teaching?	QS 1 and 2 FGI 3	EC teachers as practitioners Contextual aspects of EC teaching	(i) Planning and assessment issues (ii) Student-related issues (iii) Improved resources, equipment and facilities
RQ4: In what ways do the issues reported by EC teachers, impact upon them and their work?	QS 1 and 2 FGI 4 and 5	EC teachers as practitioners EC teachers as professionals	(i) Working with others (ii) A lack of time (iii) Health and well-being related issues
Key QS Refers to Questionnaire Sections FGI Refers to Focus Group Interview Questions			

Analysis of quantitative data.

Quantitative data comprised EC teachers' responses to the 17 Likert-type items in

Sections 3 – 8 of the questionnaire. These data were entered into an Excel

spreadsheet to permit the frequency of occurrence for each response to be totalled

and percentages calculated. By assigning numerical values to each statement, the overall mean levels of agreement were calculated (e.g., *strongly agree* being scored as 1 to the *strongly disagree* response scored as 4). The mean scores were calculated because the mean is “the only measure that reflects the influence of all scores in the distribution” (Burns, 2000, p. 44).

Most Likert-type questionnaire items were positively stated, and so lower mean scores indicated, on average, stronger levels of agreement, whilst the reverse applies to the negatively stated Items 11 and 16. Specifically, for the negatively stated items a higher mean score result indicates that respondents were in stronger disagreement with the questionnaire item presented.

As shown in Table 3.6, groups of questionnaire items corresponded to the same domains as particular interview questions. To determine whether results were of statistical significance, quantitative data were entered into the Predictive Analytics Software (applied statistical software) (PASW Statistics 18) package. Independent *t* tests were inconclusive, revealing no statistically significant differences in responses to Items 1–17 in relation to teachers’ years of experience, class size, and grade level; or educational districts. Further, cross-tabulations which compared subgroups or relationships among issues (for example, EC teachers with larger class sizes compared with those teachers who believed class size was an issue) revealed no significant patterns or trends.

Analysis of qualitative data.

Qualitative data were obtained from Section 6 of the questionnaire and from the focus group interviews and were read to identify themes, and re-read to ensure

categories were “constructed logically, according to shared characteristics of items” (Lankshear & Knobel, 2004, p. 335).

In the thesis short direct quotations from the open-ended questionnaire and interviewee data are represented using quotation marks, italicised font, and with the data source citation presented in brackets. Direct quotations greater than 40 words are in italics and have been indented. Alternatively, text referring to the questionnaire items, domains, categories and subcategories are incorporated using an upper case letter, inverted commas, and standard Times New Roman font. For example, the domain, category and subcategory appear in thesis as follows: EC Teachers as Practitioners (domain); “Contributing to student learning” (category); and “Positive influence on student learning” (subcategory).

Questionnaires.

Qualitative data were obtained from the open-ended statements posed in Section 6, EC teachers’ “Perceptions of job satisfaction”. Responses to the two statements “Since commencing teaching the highlights of my teaching have been...” (Item 29) and “Since commencing teaching the downsides of my teaching have been...” (Item 30) were entered into a Word document and coded to generate response categories which were used to determine the participants’ perceptions of teaching in EC classrooms.

Gay et al. (2009) define coding as the “process of marking units of texts with codes or labels as a way to indicate patterns and meaning in data” (p. 458). Accordingly, data analyses began after approximately 20 questionnaires had been read, as themes began to emerge and categories to form. As Thomas (2003) suggests, the “find” function on the computer was used to assist with locating words, and/or phrases, to be

coded, and to obtain frequency counts with relative ease and accuracy. This process provided a score for the number of times a word or phrase appeared in the document. Both the “find” facility and the highlighter tool allowed themes from the qualitative questionnaire data to be categorised and counted without de-contextualising the text (Burns, 2000). Preserving the original context of data was an important consideration; however, a few categories were formed prior to analysis namely teacher, student, and relationship related issues. As the data were analysed new categories emerged.

Each category was assigned a highlighter colour; green for teacher related issues and pink for student related issues. These highlighted responses were coded into the three domains, as briefly described in Section 3.1, having been modified from Bronfenbrenner’s (1976) ecological model and Fleer and Richardson’s (2004) socio-cultural framework. Bronfenbrenner’s ecological framework comprised six “nested” systems. Central to his framework was the individual; Bronfenbrenner recognised the unique qualities of the individual and the bio-directional affects between individual and contexts.

In this small-sized study, Bronfenbrenner’s six systems were reduced and three domains developed to allow the data to be more easily examined, analysed, interpreted, and presented. Like Bronfenbrenner’s model, the socio-cultural framework developed by Fleer and Richardson (2004), recognises the influence of the individual, his/her intra-personal interactions, and the context. Fleer and Richardson argue that each of these aspects can be analysed through one of three lenses.

A modified conceptual framework, derived from the work of Fleer and Richardson (2004), and Bronfenbrenner (1976), was developed, enabling EC teachers to report demographic data, their teaching context, and, moreover, their perceptions of change.

Focus group interviews.

Similar to the open-ended response questionnaire items, a combination of pre-determined and data derived categories were used in the analysis of interview data. Transcripts were read and re-read, and coded according to the themes that emerged. As Wellington (2000) advised, “it was necessary to examine and refine categories continually, with some categories being “adapted, merged, subdivided or simply omitted: as new categories were developed and relationships ... discovered” (p. 136).

The analysis of interview transcriptions were facilitated with the use of a photocopier and scissors, using a traditional method of cutting and pasting pieces of paper into a large sketch pad (Mertens, 2010). Phrases from interview transcripts were assigned an alphanumerical figure to represent the interview site (e.g., MB), speaker number (e.g., 1 = the first speaker), and transcript page number, as discussed previously in Section 3.1.

Transcribed interview phrases were then tallied according to response categories. Percentages representing the proportion of phrases coded into each subcategory were calculated for each interview question. These summary statistics were represented in tabular form or as a figure, using frequencies and/or percentages (see for example Table 4.9).

3.8 Reliability and Validity

The researcher was mindful that she was an “instrument for collecting data” (Mertens, 2010, p. 249), and, as such, adhering to the ethical research practice was consistently applied in this study.

Reliability.

In this study, careful consideration was given to the selection of a representative study sample population, and pilot testing of the questionnaire ensured the instrument was succinct, clearly written, positively framed, and that questions were neutral, as recommended by Burns (2000) and Lankshear and Knobel (2004). These measures contributed to the likelihood that, if these instruments were used with the same population again, they would report similar findings (Wellington, 2000).

Wellington (2000) has acknowledged, however, that it is difficult to achieve total reliability when studying abstract societal concepts. Thus, the potential reliability of a questionnaire may be affected by the timing of receipt and the respondents’ well-being. For example, participants may be affected by fatigue and time constraints. “Hand-delivery” of the questionnaires to each school principal, allowed respondents to complete the questionnaires in their own time and at their own convenience, thus increasing respondents’ likelihood of completing and returning the questionnaire (Burns, 2000).

Burns (2000) states that one way to increase reliability in the context of Likert-type items is to “prevent a [respondent] ticking madly away down the same column” or “carelessly” completing (p. 564). This aspect can be addressed by random placement of positively and negatively worded items (Burns, 2000), and so negatively worded

items (i.e., Items 11 and 16) were incorporated into the questionnaire to increase the likelihood that participants would read each statement carefully.

Focus group interviews enabled the researcher to follow-up on the data provided by EC teachers in response to the questionnaire items. Burns (2000) recommends that the study sample be representative of the original population, or that the same members of the population be used. In the focus group interviews, the participants who volunteered to participate were drawn from the original study population, and had completed and returned a questionnaire. They were each interviewed by the researcher using the same interview schedule (see Appendix J). Thus, the research design avoided sampling errors and, as such, increased data reliability.

Even if using the same instruments, there is a risk that multiple researchers could produce dissimilar results. To guard against this the one researcher conducted all data collection and analysis, thereby maximising consistency in the conduct of these tasks.

Validity.

Burns (2000) states, “it is reasonable to assume that greater truthfulness will be obtained if the respondents ... remain anonymous” (p. 584). Burns’ (2000) advice was followed and respondents were informed that the identity of participants providing data would be kept in strict confidence, and the data securely stored in either a password-protected computer or as hard copy data in a locked filing cabinet at the University of Tasmania. These measures enhanced the validity of the results.

Negatively and positively stated questionnaire items were provided to encourage respondents to “read and judge the statements carefully” thereby increasing

reliability and validity (Burns, 2000, p. 559). Secondly, interview questions were developed following preliminary analysis of questionnaire data. In this way, it is reasonable to expect that the “relations between variables ... did not happen by chance” (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2008, pp. 107-108).

3.9 Minimising Bias

Weirsmas and Jurs (2005) contend that the accurate interpretation of results is an important consideration to ensure data provide an accurate and true account. At all times, data compilation, coding, analysis, and reporting were thorough and reduce bias. To minimise researcher bias, two independent research professionals monitored data analysis. Thus, there is a reasonable degree of confidence in the validity of the interpretation and analysis of questionnaire data. In this study it was hypothesised that data obtained from different instruments and multiple perspectives would reflect similar themes, and categories, thereby ensuring that the instruments were reliable and the results valid.

3.10 Summary of Chapter 3

In summary, Chapter 3 has provided an overview of the research approach and research questions and discussed the ethical considerations related to this study. The study sample, study time line, the data collection instruments, and their reliability and validity, and data analysis techniques have been described. In the following chapter results obtained from data analysis are presented.

Chapter 4

Results

This chapter presents quantitative and qualitative data obtained from questionnaires and focus group interviews. Data are presented using a modified socio-cultural conceptual framework, comprising three domains, namely: EC Teachers as Practitioners; EC Teachers as Professionals; and Contextual Aspects of EC Teaching. These three domains were used throughout the study as lenses for the analyses of data obtained and are used to provide a framework for the results.

4.1 Study Sample

Stratified purposeful sampling was achieved using the Tasmanian Department of Education ENI (2007). This enabled the researcher to ensure that participants selected were a representative sample of EC teachers in terms of gender, years of teaching experience, and school location and size (see Chapter 3, Section 3.3).

Questionnaire distribution and return rate.

As previously shown in Chapter 3, Section 3.3 Table 3.2, of the 158 questionnaires distributed, 65 were returned completed (representing a 41.1% return rate) by EC teachers who were teaching in the three (North, South, North-West) regions of the eight regions of Tasmania. These three regions comprised six state school educational districts. The distribution of respondents was as follows:

- in the Northern region all respondents (n=12) came from the one large educational district, Esk;
- EC participants from the North-West region (n=19) were teaching across the two districts of Arthur (n=6) and Barrington (n= 13); and
- Southern participants (n=34) came from three districts, namely Bowen (n=12), Derwent (n=17), and Hartz (n=5).

Focus group interview.

Of the 65 questionnaire respondents, 15 EC teachers (23.07%) participated in six semi-structured focus group interviews. Interviewees came from different school districts (see Section 3.3, Table 3.2). Of the six small group interviews conducted, 46.6 percent of the total number of interviewees included female teachers from the Northern region, educational district of Esk.

4.2 Teaching Background

Section 1 of the questionnaire sought data from the study's respondents in relation to their teaching background, specialisation, and total years of teaching experience. In this context, specialisation is a classification which refers to the area or field that teachers use to articulate their greatest level of professional training, understanding and knowledge. Implicit in the request for this information is the understanding that not all EC teachers are teaching in the area of their specialisation, that is they are "teaching out of area".

The responses reported by participating teachers were classified into three conceptual domains: EC Teachers as Practitioners; EC Teachers as Professionals and Contextual

Aspects of EC Teaching. The demographic data provided in the following section are categorised in relation to EC Teachers as Practitioners.

EC Teachers as Practitioners: Gender.

The first item in Section 1 of the questionnaire asked teachers to report their gender. Of the 65 questionnaires returned, all but two were completed by female teachers. Focus group interviews reflected a similar gender balance, comprising 87.7 percent female (n=13) and 13.3 percent male (n=2) teachers. The two male teachers (n=2) who returned questionnaires both self-nominated to participate in the focus group interviews, thus 100 percent of male questionnaire respondents were interviewed.

EC Teachers as Practitioners: Teaching specialisation.

The second question of Section 1 of the questionnaire sought information regarding respondents' "Teaching specialisation". Teachers were asked to select one of four areas to describe their teaching specialisation. These were, "Early childhood", "Primary", "Secondary", or "Other". The percentages and numbers of teachers indicating each subcategory are shown in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1
Teaching Specialisation

Teaching Specialisation	Numbers of teachers	Percentage
Early Childhood	49	75.4
Primary	9	13.8
Secondary	1	1.5
Other	5	7.8
No response	1	1.5

In the subcategory “Other”, five teachers reported different areas of specialisation, of these only two teachers provided their specialisations, which were music (n=1), and physical education (n=1).

EC Teachers as Practitioners: Years of teaching experience.

In Section 1 question 3 respondents were asked to indicate the number of years they had been teaching. The results are shown in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2
Years of Teaching Experience

Years of Teaching Experience	Numbers of teachers	Percentage
More than 16 years	44	67.7
Between 8-15 years	13	20.0
Less than 7 years	8	12.3

Respondents were thus predominantly experienced teachers with 87.7 percent (n=57) having more than 8 years of teaching experience.

Focus group interviewees revealed more specific information regarding the extent of the teaching experience of this subset of the questionnaire respondents. Of the interviewees who reported their years of experience (n=12), 83.3 percent of teachers (n=10) reported having more than 15 years of teaching experience. Of greater importance is that 50 percent of these teachers (n=6) reported more than 25-31 years' teaching experience. Of this group of experienced teachers, interviewees (n=4) working in schools located on the North-West coast of Tasmania reported having taught for more than 25-31 years.

In summary, almost all of the questionnaire respondents were female, approximately three quarters identified as early childhood specialists, and two-thirds reported more than 16 years of teaching experience.

4.3 Class Context

Section 2 of the questionnaire sought information about the respondents' current class grouping, in particular the size and the grade level of the class that they were teaching at the time of questionnaire distribution. These results are presented below.

EC Teachers as Practitioners: Current class size.

To describe their current "Class size", respondents were asked to select one of the following options: fewer than 15 students; 16-20 students; 21-24 students, and more than 25 students. Of the 64 teachers who provided a response to this question, 86 percent (n=55) indicated a class size of greater than 20 students. Of these, 54.7 percent of teachers (n=35) selected a class of 21-24 students, and 31.3 percent of teachers (n=20) selected a class size more than 25. These data indicate that a class size of between 21-24 students was the most common grouping reported by EC teachers.

EC Teachers as Practitioners: Current grade level.

The second of the two statements in Section 2 of the questionnaire sought teachers' responses to the current "Grade level" they were teaching. Sixty-three respondents indicated the grade level of their current class by nominating one of the five options, namely: Preparatory [Prep]; P/1; Grade 1; Grade 1/2 or other. Teachers' responses indicated nine grade level combinations as shown in Table 4.3.

Table 4.3
Grade Level Distribution

Key	Grade Level	Number of teachers	Percentage
K	Kindergarten	4	6.3
K/P	Kindergarten and Preparatory	2	3.2
P	Preparatory	14	22.2
P/1	Preparatory and Grade 1	9	14.3
1	Grade 1	7	11.1
P/1/2	Preparatory, Grade 1 and Grade 2	1	1.6
2	Grade 2	1	1.6
2/3	Grade 2 and Grade 3	6	9.5

The most commonly taught grade was preparatory. Children in this grade are between 5 and 6 years of age. Twenty-five teachers (39.6%) reported teaching at least some preparatory grade students in their current class.

4.4 Questionnaire Responses Concerning Change

Section 3 of the questionnaire invited teachers to respond to eight statements (Items 6-13) regarding the impact of change in ECE. As described in Section 3.3 of Chapter 3 in this section of the questionnaire EC teachers were invited to report on aspects of societal, political, economic, and technological change.

EC Teachers as Practitioners: Responses concerning the impact of change in EC.

Responses to each statement were scored on a scale of 1 to 4, where 1 indicated strongly agree (SA), 2 agree (A), 3 disagree (D), and 4 strongly disagree (SD), to allow analysis of the issues which EC teachers perceived to have had the greatest impact upon them as educators. Mean scores (M) were calculated. The lower a mean score the stronger the level of agreement, whilst the reverse applies to the negatively stated item (Q.11). Sorted by the level of agreement Table 4.4 presents teachers'

perceptions of change, commencing with the questionnaire statement which returned the higher agreement frequency.

As shown in Table 4.4 almost all of the respondents (98.4%) strongly agreed that “Changes in family structures impact on teachers’ workloads and responsibilities” (Item 7), and nearly two-thirds (64.6%, n=42) strongly agreed that changes to family structures had impacted on teachers’ work.

Consistent with teachers’ views that changes in family structures had impacted upon their work, respondents (n=64), representing 98.4 percent of the study sample, also reported agreement that “Compared to teachers a decade ago, teachers today are required to teach students an increased and more diverse range of values, skills and understandings” (Item 6). The majority (84.7%) of teachers (n=55) agreed or strongly agreed that “Some parents treat schools as a child-minding service” (Item 9).

Table 4.4

Teachers' Responses to Change-Related Issues – Lowest to Highest Mean Scores

Items	Total	M	SA	A	D	SD
	responses		No. (%)	No. (%)	No. (%)	No. (%)
Q.7 Changes in family structures impact on teachers' workloads and responsibilities	65	1.37	42 (64.6)	22 (33.8)	1 (1.6)	0 (0)
Q.6 Compared to teachers a decade ago, teachers today are required to teach students an increased and more diverse range of values, skills and understandings	65	1.52	32 (49.2)	32 (49.2)	1 (1.6)	0 (0)
Q.9 Some parents treat schools as a child-minding service	65	1.89	17 (26.2)	38 (58.5)	10 (15.3)	0 (0)
Q.8 In my school the learning provisions for students with specific and/or additional learning needs are comprehensive and highly effective	63	2.21	10 (15.9)	32 (50.8)	19 (30.1)	2 (3.2)
*Q.11 The educational gains for ECE students using computers in the classroom are limited	64	2.58	8 (12.5)	17 (26.6)	33 (51.5)	6 (9.4)
Q.13 In my school teachers have ample time to discuss pedagogical issues with colleagues	64	2.61	1 (1.6)	31 (48.4)	24 (37.5)	8 (12.5)
Q.10 Technology has streamlined student reporting and assessment processes	64	2.66	2 (3.1)	24 (37.5)	32 (50.0)	6 (9.4)
Q.12 Policy makers consult with teachers when making decisions about curriculum initiatives or change	64	3.11	1 (1.6)	7 (10.9)	40 (62.5)	16 (25.0)

*Denotes negatively stated item

In spite of these changes more than half (66.7%) of respondents (n=42) agreed that “In my school the learning provisions for children with specific and/or additional learning needs are comprehensive and highly effective” (Item 8).

In relation to teaching and student learning, over half of the teachers (n=39) reported disagreement and another 9.4 percent of respondents (n=6) strongly disagreed with the negatively worded item, “The educational gains for ECE students using computers in the classroom are limited” (Item 11).

Many (n=38, 59.4%) disagreed that “Technology has streamlined student reporting and assessment processes” (Item 10). However, a notable minority of the teachers (40.6%, n=26) agreed with the statement.

Questionnaire responses to the statement “In my school teachers have ample time to discuss pedagogical issues with colleagues” (Item 13) were equally divided, with half of the respondents (n=32, 50%) agreeing and the other half disagreeing with the statement. Furthermore, 12.5 percent of teachers (n= 8) strongly disagreed that they did not “have time to discuss pedagogical issues” (Item 13) with their colleagues. Just one respondent strongly agreed that there was ample time for professional discussions with colleagues.

Most respondents (87.5%, n=56) disagreed that “Policy makers consult with teachers when making decisions about curriculum initiatives or change” (Item 12). This group comprised 62.5 percent (n=40) who disagreed and 25 percent (n=16) who strongly disagreed. Thus, EC teachers in this study clearly believed there was a lack of consultation with teachers by policy makers about curriculum changes and initiatives.

In summary, respondents reported that change in family patterns, an increase and greater diversity of student learning needs, an increase in technological advancements, a lack of consultation with teachers by policy makers about

curriculum initiatives, and time for pedagogical discussions with colleagues were change-related issues for them.

The next section presents the results from Section 4 of the questionnaire, regarding teachers' perceptions of teaching in EC classrooms.

EC Teachers as Practitioners: Responses concerning teaching in EC.

Section 4 of the questionnaire invited EC teachers to respond to statements in relation to teaching in EC classrooms. As discussed in Section 4.4, teachers' responses were scored on a scale of 1 to 4, to allow analysis of the factors which teachers perceived to have the greatest impact upon them as educators. Most statements were positively worded; therefore, the lower the mean score the stronger agreement from the respondents, with the opposite applying to the negatively stated Item 16. The results are shown in Table 4.5.

Almost all (98.5%) of the teachers involved in this study agreed that they "enjoy helping students to learn" (Item 19). Of the responses received, 89.3 percent of teachers strongly agreed with this statement.

In relation to students' learning, the majority of respondents (97%, n=63) were in agreement with the statement "I have a wide and varied range of student abilities in my classroom" (Item 14), with 87.7 percent of respondents (n=57) strongly agreeing; and 9.3 percent (n=6) agreeing.

Responses provided for Item 16, "Society does not value nor appreciate the work that teachers do", showed that 79.4 percent of respondents (n=50) agreed, or strongly agreed.

Table 4.5
Teachers' Responses to Teaching in EC – Lowest to Highest Mean Score

Items	Total		SA	A	D	SD
	responses	M	No. (%)	No. (%)	No. (%)	No. (%)
Q.19 I enjoy helping students to learn	65	1.14	58 (89.3)	6 (9.2)	0 (0)	1 (1.6)
Q.14 I have a wide and varied range of student abilities in my classroom	65	1.17	57 (87.7)	6 (9.3)	1 (1.5)	1 (1.5)
*Q.16 Society does not value nor appreciate the work that teachers do	63	1.89	21 (33.4)	29 (46.0)	12 (19.0)	1 (1.6)
Q.22 In my school teachers who have students with specific or high educational needs receive additional support	64	2.05	11 (17.2)	42 (65.6)	8 (12.5)	3 (4.7)
Q.15 During the last two weeks I spent an average of 2 hours per day dealing with students who are easily distracted and/or disrupt peers	65	2.28	17 (26.2)	15 (23.1)	31 (47.6)	2 (3.1)
Q.20 In my school there are opportunities for my career advancement	63	2.48	4 (6.3)	31 (49.3)	22 (34.9)	6 (9.5)
Q.17 My class size is conducive to teaching and student learning	65	2.51	8 (12.3)	23 (35.4)	27 (41.5)	7 (10.8)
Q.21 My salary is sufficient for my workload	62	2.82	4 (6.5)	17 (27.4)	27 (43.5)	14 (22.6)
Q.18 Non-contact time is ample for my planning and resource preparations	65	3.09	3 (4.6)	12 (18.5)	26 (40.0)	24 (36.9)
*Denotes negatively stated item						

Most respondents (65.6%, n=42), agreed or strongly agreed (17.2%, n=22) with the statement “In my school teachers who have students with specific or high

educational needs receive additional support” (Item 22). Of the 11 respondents (17.2%) who did not agree with this statement, 4.7 percent strongly disagreed (n=3), and 12.5 percent disagreed (n=8), resulting in a mean score of 2.05. Thus it is evident that over 82 percent of respondents believed that teachers in their schools received additional support for students with high educational needs.

In response to the statement, “During the last two weeks I spent an average of 2 hours per day dealing with students who are easily distracted and/or disrupt peers” (Item 15), slightly more than half of the teachers indicated they disagreed with this item. Specifically, respondents 47.6 percent (n=31) indicated they disagreed, whilst 3.1 percent strongly disagreed (n=2) with this item. Thus, approximately half the EC teachers indicated that they were managing students with disruptive/distracted behaviours for over 2 hours each day.

Slightly more than half of the respondents (55.6%, n=35) agreed with the statement that “In my school there are opportunities for my career advancement” (Item 20). Of these responses, 49.3 percent agreed (n=31), and 6.3 percent strongly agreed (n=4) with this item. However, 34.9 percent of respondents (n=22) disagreed, and 9.5 percent (n=6) strongly disagreed.

In relation to class size, the results show that just over half (52.3%) of the teachers disagreed (n=34) with the statement that their current class size facilitated teaching and student learning processes.

Respondents were invited to report their perceptions of the adequacy of salary in relation to workload. Most respondents (66.1%, n=41) disagreed with the statement that “My salary is sufficient for my workload” (Item 21). However, a sizeable minority (33.9 %) agreed that their salary was suited to their workloads. This

minority comprised 27.4 percent (n=17) of respondents who agreed, and 6.5 percent (n=4) who strongly agreed.

Over three quarters (76.9%, n=50) of respondents disagreed with the statement “Non-contact time is ample for my planning and resource preparations” (Item 18), which resulted in a mean score result of 3.09; the highest level of disagreement for the nine statements in Section 4 of the questionnaire.

In summary of the questionnaire data, the majority of EC teachers were agreed that they enjoyed helping students to learn, that they have a wide and varied range of abilities in their classes. However, over three-quarters of EC teachers agreed that the work that teachers do was not valued nor appreciated by society. In addition, 83.8 percent of the teachers (n=53) were agreed that in schools teachers of students with high needs receive additional support.

The next section of the questionnaire examined in more depth EC teachers’ perceptions of the amount of time spent on teaching-related tasks. The results are presented in the next section of this chapter.

EC Teachers as Practitioners: Responses concerning the amount of time spent on teaching-related tasks.

Section 5 of the questionnaire (Items 23-28) invited EC teachers to indicate their perceptions of the amount of time they spent each week on six teaching-related tasks. Teachers were invited to indicate on a 4 point scale the amount of time required for each teaching task. For the purpose of analysis, a rating scale was used where “1” indicated that the task took considerable proportions of a teacher’s work time; “2” a medium amount of a teacher’s work time; “3” a limited amount of time; and “4”

indicated that the task required no time. Results of Section 5 Items 23 – 28 of the questionnaire are presented in Table 4.6, ordered from the highest to lowest time spent.

Table 4.6
Time Spent on Teaching-Related Tasks – Highest to Lowest Amounts of Time

Items	Total responses	M	High No. (%)	Medium No. (%)	Low No. (%)	None No. (%)
Q.24 Planning for teaching	65	1.29	46 (70.8)	19 (29.2)	0 (0)	0 (0)
Q.23 Creation of teaching aids/resources	65	1.54	33 (50.8)	29 (44.6)	3 (4.6)	0 (0)
Q.28 Recording and compiling student assessments	65	1.55	30 (46.2)	34 (52.3)	1 (1.5)	0 (0)
Q.26 Staff and/or grade meetings	65	1.92	16 (24.6)	38 (58.5)	11 (16.9)	0 (0)
Q.27 Displays of student work	65	2.06	17 (26.2)	31 (47.6)	15 (23.1)	2 (3.1)
Q.25 Parent meetings	65	2.35	8 (12.3)	28 (43.1)	27 (41.5)	2 (3.1)

In summary, as shown in Table 4.6, teachers reported spending the greatest amounts of time on: planning for teaching; the creation of teaching aids/resources; and recording compiling student assessments. Teachers reported spending less time attending staff and/or grade meetings and displays of student work. The least time was spent in parent meetings.

Throughout this chapter, qualitative questionnaire data are presented in relation to the relevant domain, category and subcategory. In addition, the total numbers of responses as a frequency score and as a response percentage are shown. As discussed earlier (see Table 3.1, Section 3.2, Chapter 3), responses to the open-ended questionnaire items and interview transcriptions were coded using a similar format.

As discussed previously in Section 3.5, Section 6 of the questionnaire was divided into two parts; first the highlights (Item 29), and second the downsides (Item 30) of

EC teaching. Teachers' open-ended responses were categorised into three conceptual domains: EC Teachers as Practitioners; EC Teachers as Professionals; and Contextual Aspects of EC Teaching. The results reported by respondents in relation to the highlights of teaching in EC results are presented below.

4.5 EC Teachers' Perceptions of the Highlights of Teaching

Teachers' perceptions of the highlights of teaching in EC classrooms were analysed into three conceptual domains namely: EC Teachers as Practitioners; EC Teachers as Professionals; and Contextual Aspects of EC Teaching. Within each domain, categories and subcategories were identified, and frequencies of responses assigned to each aspect as reported by responding EC teachers. The results are presented in Table 4.7.

Table 4.7
EC Teachers' Perceptions of the Highlights of Teaching

	Total responses	%
EC Teachers as Practitioners	154	(77.4%)
• Contributing to Student Learning	112	56.3
- Positive influence on student learning	49	24.7
- Enjoyment of teaching/working with students	37	18.6
- Recognising student achievements	26	13.0
• Teachers Developing Positive Relationships	42	21.1
- With colleagues	24	12.1
- With parents	11	5.5
- With students	7	3.5
EC Teachers as Professionals	36	(18.1%)
• Job Satisfaction and Success	36	18.1
- Receiving professional recognition/appreciation	19	9.5
- Participating in professional learning and collaborative planning	17	8.6
Contextual Aspects of EC Teaching	9	(4.5%)
• School Context	9	4.5
- Positive school environments	9	4.5
Total Number of Responses	199	(100.0%)

Respondents reported a total of 199 positive highlights, of which most (n=154) were analysed as belonging to the domain EC Teachers as Practitioners. Each domain, along with its categories and subcategories are discussed in turn in the following sections.

EC Teachers as Practitioners: Contributing to student learning.

The analysis of questionnaire data presented in Table 4.7 indicates that EC teachers were of the belief that contributing to students' learning was a highlight of their teaching, with over half (56.3%) of the total responses received referring to this aspect. Typical of the questionnaire responses were the following statements:

“Success in helping children with learning difficulties” (BA13); and “Challenging children’s thinking [and being able to] see children grow and learn emotionally and intellectually over a year” (D2). Teachers wrote of the satisfaction they derived from providing “Literacy support for children [who were] struggling to read” (H2); and from “seeing students improve their reading, and having difficult students change their attitude towards their learning and/or behaviour” (A3).

This was reflected in interviews another teacher said she also enjoyed teaching and working with younger students. Reporting teaching in EC was fulfilling, she said:

I think it’s the amount of learning in prep, which is so amazing. At the moment we are looking at photos of children when they were first at kinder and in prep at the beginning of the year. Children grow physically and academically so much in that first year at school. It has been beautiful to be part of that and just to be part of their lives. (MB2/2)

Teachers spoke of their contentment, which developed from their role working in EC:

I think they [students] are so fresh. Younger children are like sponges, they are just not jaded by the world at all. They just soak up everything. It doesn’t matter what subject or topic you introduce to them – they take it all

in. When they get older children start to get a bit cynical and a little bit jaded. (M1/2)

EC Teachers as Practitioners: Teachers developing positive relationships.

In this study, EC teachers referred to relationship building as a positive aspect of their work, with over a fifth of the total questionnaire responses being in this category. Teachers referred positively to building strong relationships with colleagues, parents, and students. For example, respondents wrote that “*Building positive relationships with children and their parents*” (BO4) and “*Working with talented colleagues*” (BO6) had contributed positively to their perceptions of teaching.

EC Teachers as Professionals: Job satisfaction and success.

Results indicated that receiving professional recognition and participating in professional learning and collaborative planning were highlights of their career. Indicative of the responses provided by respondents were the following statements: “*Being told by a researcher [in a previous study] that I am one of the 13 highest scoring teachers with literacy PIP results in the state*” (D1) and having been “*awarded national recognition*” in teaching (D3). Hence, for 18.1 percent of respondents, receiving recognition and appreciation, professional learning, and collaborative planning were perceived as teaching highlights.

Contextual Aspects of EC Teaching: Positive school environments.

Responses to highlights of teaching contexts were divided into two categories, due to the broad nature of what constitutes the concept of context. With only 4.5 percent of the total responses Contextual Aspects of EC Teaching attracted fewer responses,

which were all grouped within the category of “School context”. The highlights reported were associated with teaching in an “*Excellent small school environment*” (BA1) and as a consequence of “*Working in an inclusive setting*” (H4). Within the category, “School contexts” “Positive school environments” were mentioned nine times representing 4.5 percent of the total responses received.

In summary, responses from EC teachers pointed to two main highlights of teaching; “Contributing to student learning” and “Teachers developing positive relationships”. The data indicate that teachers in this study enjoyed contributing to student learning, and establishing positive relationships with colleagues, parents, and students.

4.6 EC Teachers’ Perceptions of the Downsides of Teaching

Teachers’ perceptions of the downsides or challenges of teaching in EC classrooms were analysed into three conceptual domains namely: EC Teachers as Practitioners; EC Teachers as Professionals; and Contextual Aspects of EC Teaching. Within each domain, categories and subcategories were identified, and frequencies of responses assigned to each aspect as reported by responding EC teachers. These responses are presented in Table 4.8.

Table 4.8

EC Teachers' Perceptions of the Downsides of Teaching

	Total responses	%
EC Teachers as Practitioners	200	(73.3%)
• Teacher-related Issues	119	43.6
- Planning/assessment issues	47	17.2
- Managing the changing curriculum	42	15.4
- Lack of time	30	11.0
• Student-related Issues	51	18.7
- Students who are “included”	19	7.0
- Behaviourally challenged students	17	6.2
- Changing student attitudes	15	5.5
• Relationship Issues	30	11.0
- Parent-based	24	8.8
- Senior staff/colleague related	6	2.2
EC Teachers as Professionals	47	(17.2%)
• Job Satisfaction	47	17.2
- Issues related to health and well-being	28	10.2
- Lack of professional recognition	19	7.0
Contextual Aspects of EC Teaching	26	(9.5%)
• Changing Attitudes toward Teacher/School	16	5.8
- Society/media-based	10	3.7
- By Department of Education (DoE)	6	2.1
• School Context	10	3.7
- School demographics	7	2.6
- Budget-related issues	3	1.1
Total Number of Responses	273	(100.0%)

Of the 273 responses reported by EC teachers, the highest proportion (73.3%) related to the domain EC Teachers as Practitioners. Each domain, along with its categories and subcategories, is discussed in turn in the following sections.

EC Teachers as Practitioners: Teacher-related issues.

As shown in Table 4.8, 43.6 percent of the total number of responses related to three key challenges: planning/assessment, managing the changing curriculum, and a lack of time. The following statements are typical of responses relative to planning/assessment and a lack of time; “*The frequent changes made to curriculum*

and reporting documents and the amount of time needed to gain an understanding of them” (BO5); and curriculum challenges; *“The curriculum and reporting are changing”* (D2); and *“Confusion over curriculum changes”* (BO2).

Responses indicated that respondents were confronted by a frequently changing curriculum and the tasks associated with continuous educational reform. Within the three areas identified, it is evident that EC teachers involved in this study found that “Teacher-related issues” were a challenge.

EC Teachers as Practitioners: Student-related issues.

As shown in Table 4.8, three categories emerged relating to student-related challenges. These categories related to students who are ‘included’, those with behavioural issues, and students’ changing attitudes. EC teachers perceived that an *“increase in children with special needs without adequate support”* (D3); and *“insufficient support for high needs students”* (E5) were downsides associated with the integration of ‘included’ students. Further, in relation to poor behaviour, *“physical contact from students with behavioural issues”* (BA5); *“students with behavioural issues being physical with [other] students”* (BA5); *“managing violent and disruptive children”* (E10); *“an increase in behavioural issues particularly those related to [students with] ADHD”* (BO5), and *“dealing with angry and aggressive students”* (A2); and *“the changing attitudes of children”* (BO3); were challenging, and downsides of teaching. Teachers were concerned about students with special learning needs, behavioural problems, and changing attitudes.

EC Teachers as Professionals: Job satisfaction.

The second domain contained one category; “Job satisfaction” which was divided into two subcategories: “Issues related to health and well-being” and a “Lack of professional recognition”. A few teachers in this study reported health and well-being issues which arose from being stressed with “*the treatment from nasty parents*” (BO1), the “*amount of sickness*” (BA10) “*working in housing commission schools*” (H14), and a lack of professional recognition when “*becoming a ‘number’ in a department rather than [a] ‘person’*” (BA8).

Contextual Aspects of EC Teaching: Changing attitudes towards teachers/schools.

The third domain of downsides contained the fewest number of responses (n= 26, 9.5%). In this domain, two categories were identified: “Changing attitudes toward teacher/school” and “School context”. The small number of responses in this domain indicates that only a small group of EC teachers perceived this to be a downside of teaching. Nevertheless, respondents indicated that there were concerns. These included: “*Crazy, unsupportive parents [and] the constant ‘knocking’ [of] teachers by government/politicians*” (BA6). One teacher identified “*the continual degrading of teachers by the government and the media*” (H10) as a concern.

4.7 Interviewees’ Responses Regarding Reasons for Becoming Teachers

To gain a deeper understanding of what respondents believed contributes to teaching satisfaction, an interview question was developed to probe whether positive career perceptions could be related to the reasons behind initial considerations for becoming a teacher. Interviewees were invited to respond to theme Reasons for Becoming a Classroom Teacher by responding to Interview Questions 1a: “Can you share with

the group why you became a teacher?”, and 1b:” 1b What are the benefits for you personally of being an early childhood teacher?”

When asked to provide reasons for becoming EC teachers, interviewees provided a total of 65 responses. Data were analysed into the domain EC Teachers as Practitioners, and fell into two categories: “Contributing to successful learning” and “Developing positive relationships”. The total responses, as shown in bold in Table 4.9, represent both a frequency and a percentage within each category.

Table 4.9
Reasons for Becoming a Classroom Teacher

	Total responses	%
EC Teachers as Practitioners	(65)	(100.0%)
• Contributing to Successful Learning	49	(75.4%)
- Witnessing/contributing to student learning	40	61.5
- Enjoyment of working with students	5	7.7
- Ongoing learning about pedagogy	4	6.2
• Developing Positive Relationships	16	(24.6%)
- With students/colleagues	16	24.6
Total Number of Responses	65	(100.0%)

EC Teachers as Practitioners: Contributing to successful learning.

As discussed in Chapter 3, Section 3.2, interview transcripts were coded using alpha-numerical codes. In Table 4.9, 75.4 percent of responses related to “Contributing to successful learning”. Indicative of the typical responses teachers provided was the following interview comment from a teacher:

It is the growth of the child from day one, it's the satisfaction from seeing them pick up a level 4 or level 5 reader at the start of the year and then at the end of the year, they were up to level 15 or whatever it might be. (M1/2)

Responses in this category fell into three subcategories. These items included “Witnessing/contributing to student learning” (61.5% of all responses); the “Enjoyment of working with students” (7.7%), and, “Ongoing learning about

pedagogy” (6.2%). The last of these was indicative of some EC teachers regarding their continuing professional learning as a reason for contributing to successful learning. In relation to the satisfaction of working with students, one interviewee stated: *“I really love the early childhood stuff because ... learning can still be lots of fun”* (MB4/2).

The second category, attracting 24.6 percent of the total responses, was “Developing Positive Relationships”. Within this category, EC teachers considered that having opportunities to develop “Positive relationships with students/colleagues” was a contributing reason for becoming an EC teacher. Relationships with students and families were also perceived to be an important factor with typical responses including the following: *“For me, the enthusiasm of young children in particular, and working with families you help develop foundations in learning. So it is not just the children you are working with, it is also working with those families”* (S1/3). And, *“one good thing about teaching is the people around you”* (S2/6).

4.8 Interviewees’ Perceptions of the One Facet of Their Work They Would Like to Change

Interview participants were asked: “If you could change one aspect of work what would you change?” Responses were categorised within each conceptual domain, with the total responses and percentages presented in bold for each category.

Table 4.10
Change Aspirations for the Role of an EC Teacher

	Total responses	%
EC Teachers as Practitioners	(30)	(68.2%)
• Teacher-Related Issues	30	(68.2%)
- Improved resources, equipment and facilities	11	25.0
- Smaller class sizes	9	20.4
- Increased numbers of support staff	4	9.1
- More time	4	9.1
- Fewer interruptions during classroom teaching	2	.6
EC Teachers as Professionals	(11)	(25.0%)
• Job Satisfaction	11	(25.0%)
- Greater acknowledgement for teachers' work	9	20.4
- Reduction of non-teaching related roles	2	4.6
Contextual Aspects of EC Teaching	(3)	(6.8%)
• Budget-related Issues	3	(6.8)
- Increased funding	3	6.8
Total Number of Responses	44	(100.0%)

EC Teachers as Practitioners: Teacher-related issues.

Once again, issues around the domain EC Teacher as Practitioner were of greatest concern for respondents. Interviewees reported that improved resources, equipment and facilities (25% of the total responses), and smaller class sizes (20.4% of the total responses) were key aspirations. As evidenced by the following statement, teaching resources and equipment were perceived to be archaic:

I was shocked at Treetop Primary. The kindergarten is so old and so tired bikes and many toys are about 20 years old. They've still got the very old fashioned tape players with earphone sets; their easels look like they're falling apart. In the toilet there is a curtain for the children to brush past. There was one game which we have in the kindergarten, our box is brand new and attractive, she pulled hers out it has been sticky taped up about 50 times, all the game cards are pulling up at the corners. (MB4/8)

Interviewees also contended that smaller class sizes, or additional teaching support staff working within the classroom, were a priority. These concerns are illustrated by the following response: "What I would like to see change is to see more classes or

more people working in classrooms. We need smaller numbers [of students] to continue to do the work. We battle along and do what we can” (S1/7).

Without extra classroom support, EC teachers reported difficulties coping in the classroom.

EC Teachers as Professionals: Job satisfaction.

In the second domain (20.4% of the total responses), of the responses greater than 10 percent, EC teachers reported that they would like greater acknowledgement for the work they undertake. Typical comments included the following: *“Everyone needs a bit of reinforcement, I suppose. We just want someone to say ‘that was a wonderful job that you did this year’” (T3/6).*

Interviewees reported that they appreciated the acknowledgement that they did receive. For example, one participant said:

We don’t ask for it but gee it is nice when someone comes in and thanks us or says ‘My child – got it’, ... it is really nice when you get to see a light bulb moment or when someone tells you thanks for something [you have done]. Probably some of the appreciation that matters comes from the system ... from us appreciating each other and supporting each other in the way you work as a team to all help children. (S2/12)

The following statement was representative of teachers’ responses: *“Ninety-nine percent of the time, senior staff or the department or parents probably think that we are doing a really good job but I wish there was someone who was prepared to say so” (T2/7).*

Teachers reported a lack of recognition, and believed that greater acknowledgement for their work would contribute to their job satisfaction. These responses reaffirm the views provided in the questionnaire and interview data. Questionnaire data indicated

that EC teachers (79.4%) were agreed that “society does not value nor appreciate the work that teachers do” (see Table 4.5).

Contextual Aspects of EC Teaching: Budget-related issues.

The third domain received the fewest responses, with one category identified. This was Budget-related issues which received 6.8 percent of the total responses.

Interviewees stated “*More funding, I think that would be really beneficial. Funding is a frustration*” (MB2/8), and this comment was typical of teachers’ views.

In summary, when presented with the interview theme regarding the one aspect of their work which these EC teachers would like to see changed, interviewees reported three main concerns, namely: improved resources, equipment and facilities, smaller class sizes, and greater acknowledgement of teachers’ work.

4.9 Interviewees’ Responses Regarding the Impact of Change Upon Them and Their Teaching

Section 3 of the questionnaire sought teachers’ perceptions of the impact of change. Interview data related to this are reported in the following sections. Interviewees were invited to respond to Interview Theme 4 regarding the impact of change upon teachers and their teaching. Three supplementary focus group interview questions were developed: 4a “So what are the impacts of change upon you and your teaching?”; 4b “Describe a challenge you face recently in your teaching how did you plan to resolve the issue/incident?”; and 4c “I am interested in hearing your perceptions about why teachers remain in the face of challenges/changes in their roles?”

Interviewees reported that the aspects of change that had the greatest impact were related to two domains: EC Teachers as Practitioners and EC Teachers as Professionals. In Table 4.11, total responses are presented in bold as are the total number of responses and percentages within each domain, category and subcategory.

Table 4.11
Interviewees' Perceptions of the Impact of Change

	Total responses	%
EC Teachers as Practitioners	(15)	(53.6%)
• Teacher-related relationship issues	11	(39.3%)
- Difficult colleagues	9	32.1
- Unreasonable parents	2	7.2
• Student-related Issues	4	(14.3%)
- Students with special education and behavioural needs	4	14.3
EC Teachers as Professionals	(13)	(46.4%)
• Health and well-being related issues	13	(46.4%)
- Increased stress	9	32.1
- Less time for teachers' families	4	14.3
Total Number of Responses	28	(100.0%)

Twenty eight responses were provided and these fell into two of the domains which are discussed in the following subsections.

EC Teachers as Practitioners: Teacher-related relationship issues.

Just over half (53.6%) of interviewees reported challenges with difficult colleagues, unreasonable parents and students with special education and behavioural needs.

“Teacher-related relationship issues” constituted 39.3 percent of the total number of responses, and “Student related issues” comprised 14.3 percent of the total number of responses. In terms of relationship issues interviewees testified to working with difficult colleagues. A typical response provided by one teacher was: “*Well actually I’ve got somebody who is fairly ambitious teaching next door to me. She is someone who doesn’t know anything about the job that I am doing and [she] wants to come in and say what she thinks*” (NT2/7).

Unreasonable parents were also noted as an impact of change mentioned in 7.2 percent of the total number of responses. Two such responses were: *“In the school where I teach there are far more parenting problems than I would have ever imagined...”* (NT2/9); and:

I had an icky situation with a grandparent which was horrible and totally took me by surprise ... it was only because of the support from senior staff that we managed to get through that. It was really horrible. (M2/10)

EC Teachers as Practitioners: Student-related issues.

The second category contained just four responses which were related to students with special education and behavioural needs. For one teacher the mid-year enrolment of a student with special needs was a challenge. She said:

Half way through the year, in our class, Andy came into our room – he was an autistic boy. Every now and then some child in the room has special needs. [Coming in midyear] everything had been settled – everyone knew each other and everything was running smoothly and suddenly you get this new person who has special needs and you had to re-adjust the classroom, re-adjust communication systems; getting the appropriate person to work with him as his aide, and having all these people turn up in your room, like speech and occupational therapists – all those types of things have been a challenge. (S1/10)

EC Teachers as Professionals: Health and well-being related issues.

In relation to Teachers as Professionals health and well-being related issues attracted the highest number of responses (46.4% of the total responses), with two categories emerging, namely increased stress and less time for teachers' families. Stress was the most frequently cited concern reported by the interviewed teachers. The following excerpts are typical of the responses received: *“I am already worrying about that [issue] and worrying to the stage where I get really quite stressed, I think because I really do need to have a holiday”* (MB4/10). And, *“I pretty much found ... by the time I got to Christmas, I was not well. The whole stress of trying to do*

everything... Work that hadn't been done was piling up and I wasn't as prepared as I wanted to be" (M2/9).

Increased stress was one issue reported by interviewees that impacted upon their health and well-being. A smaller group of teachers reported having less time for their family. As one interviewee indicated:

Teaching eats into your family life, that's for sure. Even though the school has been really supportive in that we don't have to go to the staff meetings for those few weeks which has been great, but there are still the things that you do at home. (MB2/10)

4.10 Interviewees' Responses Regarding Perceptions of the Requirement That They Work 35 Hours for a Teaching Week

Questionnaire data indicated that teachers' perceived the time allocated to the tasks associated with teaching was insufficient. Interviewees were, therefore, asked for further information about the requirement that they work 35 hours per week.

Interview Question 6 reported interviewees' perceptions regarding working 35 hours a week. Responses to this question related to just one domain, EC Teachers as Practitioners, and one category within that, namely "Time-related issues". Table 4.12 shows the total numbers of responses to this question along with frequencies, the domain, category and subcategory.

Table 4.12
Teachers' Perceptions of Working a 35-Hour Week

	Total responses	%
EC Teachers as Practitioners	36	(100.0%)
• Time-related Issues	36	(100.0%)
- Increased planning and preparation required outside work hours	15	41.7
- The need to work at home on Sundays to ensure readiness for the next week	10	27.8
- Lack of time during the school day to complete all requirements	8	22.2
- Too many meetings consuming extra hours	3	8.3
Total Number of Responses	36	(100.0%)

EC Teachers as Practitioners: Time-related issues.

Teachers in this study reported being time poor, deeming it necessary to work after work hours in order to complete essential teaching-related tasks. Typical comments included: “*Planning - [I] set aside a couple of hours on Sunday afternoon and evening*” (S1/9); “*I found that it was very difficult. I couldn’t do the things I felt needed to be done for my class at the time in the 35 hours*” (M2/9), and “*I do far more than my load. I do it at home. I work about an extra four or five hours on a Sunday and when I write reports—that is about an hour so*” (NT1/5).

Some EC teachers perceived their work as ongoing, with one saying he/she “*never completely switch[es] off*” (M2/8). These data suggest that the teachers perceived their work to require more than the allocated 35 hours for a teaching week.

4.11 Summary of Chapter 4

This chapter has presented results gathered from research undertaken in Tasmanian primary schools from EC teachers who had consented to participate in this study.

The data were presented using three domains, namely EC Teachers as Practitioners; EC Teachers as Professionals; and Contextual Aspects of EC Teaching.

Section 4.1 reported questionnaire responses and focus group interview data in relation to the study sample. Sections 4.2 and 4.3 described demographic data, in terms of participants' teaching background (gender, specialisation, and years of teaching experience) and class context (current class size and grade level). Sections 4.4 – 4.12, reported data about teachers' perceptions of the impact of change, and the highlights and downsides of teaching in EC classrooms.

The following chapter presents a discussion of these results as they pertain to the research questions, the three domains, and the relevant research literature.

Chapter 5

Discussion

This chapter will discuss the results in relation to each of the four research questions by considering the findings in relation to the three domains, and relevant literature. Additional qualitative data, provided by interviewees are used to expand upon and explore the results reported in Chapter 4.

5.1 Study Sample – Demographics

As with most Australian primary school teaching staff (ABS, 2011), this study's cohort was predominantly female (96.9%), with just two males participating in both the questionnaire and interview phases. In addition, 75.4 percent of the teachers were EC specialists, whilst another 13.8 percent of the study's sample possessed a primary specialisation. Three-quarters of the study sample could therefore be expected to possess a sound understanding of EC pedagogy, as a result of their specialist education and qualifications. Of those remaining, arguably primary specialists may well have lacked specific EC qualifications however through their practical experience are likely to have developed their capacities for teaching in EC contexts. Two thirds of participants reported more than 16 years of teaching experience (see Section 4.2 Table 4.2), and as a consequence these teachers have been privy to, and experienced the changing trends in education. Tasmanian EC teachers' perceptions of change have not previously been reported, and so it is likely these data will

provide valuable insights into the impact of change upon teachers and their work lives.

Mostly, teachers in this study were indicative of an “ageing” profession, consistent with previous research (Gardner & Williamson, 2004). Thus, it is reasonable to expect that the participants’ perceptions were informed and that they would be well positioned to reflect on changes relating to the work of EC teachers.

Respondents in this study were teaching a cross-section of grade levels. One-third of the teachers were teaching Grade 1/2 with the remaining teaching Kindergarten to Grade 2 class combinations. Nearly a quarter of EC teachers taught students aged between 5 and 6 years in a Preparatory (Prep) class. Given that the most common class size was 21 to 24 students, it is likely that most Prep teachers were teaching a class of this size without additional adult support because teacher assistants are provided routinely only for Kindergarten classes in Tasmania.

Prep follows Kindergarten in Tasmanian schools. Kindergarten enrolment is optional and, for those who participate, attendance is part-time. Staffing ratios determined by Outside School Hours Care (OSHC) apply to Kindergartens. These stipulate that where the size of the group exceeds five children the adult-child ratio is 1:10 (DoE, 2009, p. 2). Teacher Assistants (TAs) play a pivotal role in meeting these ratios, and are a support for both Kindergarten teachers and children (see Chapter 2, Section 2.2).

In contrast, Prep is recognised as the beginning of formal schooling, and is compulsory and full-time. In Prep, there are no limits set for adult to child ratios, and unless a student qualifies for a specialist TA, Prep teachers are solely responsible for

teaching, learning, supporting children, administration tasks, creating classroom displays and preparing teaching and learning resources. In this study, it is possible that the perceptions of Prep teachers (n=14) and those teaching a composite Prep classes (see Table 4.3) may have been affected by the students' ages, grade level and class size (see Section 2.6 of Chapter 2). Students' ages and teaching grade levels affects the quality of teacher child interactions (e.g., Barnett, Schulman & Shore, 2004; Blatchford et al., 2007; Graue, Hatch, Rao & Oen, 2007).

5.2 Discussion Related to RQ1 – EC Teachers as Practitioners' Responses to Change

RQ1: What change-related factors do EC teachers perceive as having had the most impact upon them and their work?

This research question is addressed by considering the key changes reported by EC teachers who participated in this study. Data were analysed using three lenses: EC Teachers as Practitioners; EC Teachers as Professionals, and Contextual Aspects of EC Teaching (see Section 3.1). Most responses to RQ1 were identified within the domain EC Teachers as Practitioners, and within this domain the following three categories emerged:

- Changes in Family Structures
- Changes in Relation to Teaching an Increased and More Diverse Range of Values, Skills and Understandings
- Curriculum Changes

In relation to the research question, the factors which were perceived to have the greatest impact upon EC teachers and their work are societal: changes in family

patterns, and political curriculum changes. As shown in Table 4.4, in relation to societal change EC teachers reported that “Compared to teachers a decade ago, [these] teachers today are required to teach students an increased and more diverse range of values, skills, and understandings”. A lack of school readiness by students, constant and ongoing curriculum reforms, and the integration of children with special needs were perceived by these teachers to affect their work lives. Each of these aspects will now be discussed, commencing with the most important issues reported by EC teachers, as indicated by their frequency of mention.

EC Teachers as Practitioners: Changes in family structures.

Nearly all teachers (98.4%; see Table 4.4) agreed that change in family patterns impact upon teachers and their work. This finding supports previous literature (Gardner & Williamson, 2004; Galton et al., 2002). In this study, however, interviewees provided additional insights. They reported that societal changes involving the changing nature of families were of concern. As one teacher explained:

I think that one thing for me is seeing different levels of dysfunction - it's really upsetting for me and having to report families to child protection. I find that incredibly difficult because some families find it a challenge to get out of bed in the morning and I can appreciate where [families] are at, but ultimately we have to protect the rights of children. I still find that challenging daily [and] when I look down a certain student's lunches or see an unkempt child or bruises and things like that ... so obviously this is something that needs to be investigated, and before you know it Child Protection are here and you're sitting with the child and the child is telling the story. I think there was a time when teachers didn't have to do that.
(MB4/13)

Central to these accounts was a sense of unease expressed by some teachers regarding the welfare of children and families. Some teachers reported that they needed to act as child advocates in order to uphold the safety and welfare of students in their classes. As mandatory reporters, teachers lawfully protect the rights of

students, while simultaneously supporting families and upholding teaching responsibilities. All this takes a toll on teachers.

Teachers also reported that breakdown also affects students and teachers:

In terms of the children [who] have had behavioural issues, sometimes there is a problem because the parents aren't speaking to each other. Or messages are not getting through to one parent, because the child spends hardly any time there. So parents are getting confused and distressed. So just in terms of the children, some of them are coming in upset because of what they have been dealing with at home. Other things like not having the reading book because it has been left at Dads, or I haven't got my homework because that is with Mum. Or the child who says I have left my school hat at dads, and I haven't got the T-shirt I needed, it's at Mum.
(M2/5)

This comment is troubling in terms of the vulnerability of young students. Children benefit from a safe, secure, and predictable environment (Arthur et al., 2008).

Alternatively, students with attachment disorders may show developmental delays, and be “at risk” of psychological and emotional disorders (Snowman et al., 2009). In this study, EC teachers reported a belief that a lack of school readiness may be accentuated when students' living arrangements are shared between divided households.

In times of family crisis, children's primary needs are often met, while areas deemed to be of less importance, such as literacy, numeracy and motor skills, are left unattended. Upon school entry, these skill deficits create problems for students and teachers. In this study, a number of respondents indicated students were unprepared for school, lacking the necessary skills to enable them to meet teacher and classroom expectations. The following comment reflected this concern “*Not placing value judgement on anyone but I just feel as though children aren't coming to school as*

ready as what they used to be. I am teaching children to do up shoelaces and life skills” (T1/3).

Teachers indicated that a lack of life skills meant students were unable to follow simple requests, and participate in a number of classroom activities. Students were dependent on teachers’ assistance to organise personal items, “*for learning, [and] simple things such as go and get your pencil*” (T3/3). Another possible explanation for a lack of school readiness might be a reduction in family support for children. A respondent wrote that there were “*more demands on teachers to be ‘parents’, to teach [students about] cleanliness, social skills etc*” (A6). Teachers in this study believed life skills are essential and ultimately family responsibilities. In addition, EC teachers perceived a lack of parental involvement in classrooms:

There are certainly more working parents who are not available to come in [to the classroom] but I think at this school there seems to be less willingness of some parents to come in. Now whether they feel that’s because of their education or the level of schooling [or] they don’t have the skills – I think there are some parents don’t actually see teachers and parents working together as a partnership – teachers teach a [student] that’s their responsibility while [parents] do their stuff. (M2/7)

EC teachers believed a reduction in parental support, and poor attitudes towards teachers and schools, affected their work. This was also reported by Dinham (2000), but teachers in this study also linked these changes with student behaviours. The observation that parents are less inclined to enter the classroom (Osborn et al, 2000), leaving teachers to educate students, may be viewed favourably if it means that teachers are perceived to be capable and parents are thus, reluctant to interfere, or are satisfied with teachers and their work in the classroom. However, as one interviewee suggested: “*We are still coming up against the parents who have had very negative*

experiences at schools themselves and they are very wary of what we [teachers] will be like, how judgemental we may be” (S1/11).

As this teacher said, there may be parents who feel threatened by the teacher and school environment and thus prefer to stay away. The following comment shows there was also a belief among the interviewees that family crisis may contribute to a lack of parental involvement in the classroom:

The children that are the most frequent users of support are from families that are in some type of chaos or trauma or break up at home – there is some type of chaos occurring that creates tension and instability at home which is brought into the classroom. (S1/5)

Parental disinterest can devalue the role of the teacher as an academic leader and shifts teachers from the role of educator to carer. In the absence of parental involvement some students resort to negative behaviours, which have long-term effects for the child family and teacher (Tarren-Sweeney et al., 2002). As the following comment shows, this can be difficult for everyone involved: “*We are not the owners of that classroom but we are in charge of developing the climate and helping support a climate by being positive for everyone. I think it can be tough*” (S2/12).

Due to the fast pace of societal change, teachers’ roles and responsibilities are increasing (Fullan, 2001). In the classroom, teachers cater for students’ educational needs, maintain a duty of care, and provide a safe environment, as well as social and emotional support (DoE, 2008a). Teachers in this study agreed they “have a wide and varied range of student abilities in my classroom” (see Table 4.5). As schools are a central part in a changing social climate (Smith & Smith, 2000), teachers are required

to teach everything from “drug education to bicycle maintenance” (Groundwater-Smith, Ewing & Cornu, 2003, p. 23).

Teachers have reported that parents often do not value or acknowledge the importance of school family partnerships (Acker, 1999; Boardman, 2005; Osborn et al., 2000). In this study, 84.7 percent of teachers (see Table 4.4) were in agreement that “Some parents treat schools as a child-minding service” (Item 9). Furthermore, 79.4 percent of EC respondents agreed that “Society does not value nor appreciate the work that teachers do” (see Table 4.5; Item 16), reporting for example “*feeling pressured, under-valued, feeling unconfident that I’m not doing a good enough job*” (A1). This is a sad perception by these teachers, as feeling appreciated and trusted was perceived by these teachers as being important to them.

Insufficient or limited life skills compromise student learning and have a tendency to predispose students to inappropriate behaviours (Fergusson & Horwood, 1998).

Many teachers in this study felt that young children were coming to school with limited self-help and social skills. These students could well be amongst those who Otten and Tuttle (2010) reported as experiencing “difficulty with executive functioning [which] can lead to many of the problems that students with challenging behavior commonly exhibit” (p. 93).

Another aspect associated with societal changes affecting families is the need for parents to work long hours in order to be financially secure, which leaves parents with little time to spend with their child/ren, or to participate in school events, including parent help (Stephenson et al., 2000). In this study, EC teachers observed that there has been a reduction in parental involvement in education. One interviewee said that:

A long time ago before mums had to work, we've had some great very supportive parents – now we're really short of parent help. Even 6 or 7 years ago there were some parents who were really involved in our school but now because they have had to go back into the workforce they're not available for parent help.

We're planning a Choir event and we sent a little note home because we needed at least six parents. I got really worried on the second day when there was no response. I thought that parents would send it straight back – well today we are up to eight but that is drawing across three classes. I hope we have enough parents because otherwise we can't go [with the students]. (W2/9)

British research (e.g., Troman, 2000) reported that the level of parental participation in primary schools has remained consistent, with parents assuming a “greater control over, and choice in, the education of their children” (Troman, 2000, p. 336). In contrast, Tasmanian teachers perceived that parents consider education to be teachers' or a school's responsibility. One interviewee believed that for some parents their child's 'needs' were secondary; overshadowed by work schedules and family routines: *“Both parents [are] going out to work, [schools and teachers] have had to adjust our timetables to suit family's needs more than the child's [education], which disappoints me because [teachers] should be focussing on the child”* (S2/4).

It has been shown that in the past parents tended to support teachers, whereas today parents are more likely to “side with” students (MacBeath et al., 2004). While this practice undermines teachers both personally and professionally (Stormont et al., 2003), it also reduces teacher motivation (Brown et al., 2002), health and well-being (Wilhelm et al., 2000).

In light of the changes reported by this study's teachers, and with the success of pre-school initiatives for children and families being well-documented and supported (Sylva et al., 2004), it is possible that all children would benefit from a mandated pre-school experience prior to full-time schooling. On the basis of interviewees'

reports that students lack school readiness, perhaps Tasmanian students would benefit from such an experience.

Traditionally, schools were places in which teachers taught and students learnt. In this study, and others (e.g., Ballet, & Kelchtermans, 2009; Day et al., 2006; Easthope, & Easthope, 2000; Galton, & MacBeath, 2008, 2010; Williamson, & Myhill, 2008), teachers reported that the role of schools has expanded, and thus teachers' responsibilities have increased. In addition to providing students with an education, support for students and their families comes in many forms, some of which include:

- Individualised support to students living in adverse family environments;
- Culturally inclusive educational programs and community awareness;
- Life skills education and programs about hygiene, social mores, etiquette, and personal care which includes toileting and dressing; and
- Diplomatic liaisons between blended or single parent families, the lack of which may prevent parents from meeting with teachers, and/or providing support to their child/ren (MacBeath & Galton, 2008).

Arguably, as teachers' time is consumed with non-teaching related tasks educational programs may be compromised, which in turn affects student learning. Previous researchers (e.g., Duncan, 2006; Hedges & Gibbs, 2005; Mackenzie, 2007; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2009) agree that changes in family structures have contributed to an increase in EC teachers' roles and responsibilities in classrooms.

Nevertheless, effective "partnerships with parents" (MacBeath & Galton, 2008, p. 77) are recognised as being of critical importance during the early years, at a time when children are most vulnerable. Thus, as Boardman (2005) reports, for optimal

student outcomes, EC teachers and families must work together in a way that serves the best interests of the child, their family, and teachers.

Changes in relation to teaching an increased and more diverse range of values, skills and understandings.

The second change-related issue reported by EC teachers related to students with diverse learning needs. Almost all EC teachers (98.4%) in this study agreed with the statement, “Compared to teachers a decade ago, teachers today are required to teach students an increased and more diverse range of values, skills and understandings” (see Table 4.4; Item 6). During interviews teachers described the complexity of planning and catering for students with differing abilities, within composite class groups. In composite classrooms (see Grade level distribution Table 4.3) students may be aged within two chronological years of one another, yet their abilities differ greatly, in terms of social, emotional and cognitive capacities. Such diversity “*creates much more work*” for teachers as they “*support ... high needs students*” (E12). Interviewees agreed that “*there is the issue of extra workload. I have to plan separately for the ‘included’ child*” (T1/12).

One possible explanation for teachers reporting an increase in workload may be attributed to a lack of student school readiness as reported by teachers in this study and discussed in Section 5.2. Unlike Kindergarten teachers, Prep teachers in Tasmania are often without the additional support from TAs. Further to this, the uniqueness of each student means that learning occurs at a different pace for each individual, and gains accrue slowly over time. Student achievements are not confined or determined by school year, and teachers do not always “see the immediate results of their work” (Lundenburg & Ornstein, 2008, p. 482). Teachers in this study

revealed that a lack of school readiness, insufficient TAs in Prep, planning and catering for the diversity in their class can be time consuming, and in the context of limited parent interest (as reported in Section 5.2) this can leave teachers feeling devalued and unsupported.

Tailoring individual programs for “included” students, and those with high learning needs takes a high level of determination and commitment; *“It is more work – what am I going to do with this ‘included’ child all day, without individual planning they will just draw all day”* (T2/12). Early childhood teachers were prepared to undertake additional planning to ensure ‘included’ students receive appropriate educational programs. However, workloads increase necessarily when teachers develop, implement, and evaluate multiple individualised student learning plans and so this could be a further contributor to the teachers’ perceptions of increased workload.

In this study, 66.7 percent of EC teachers agreed with the statement that, “In my school the learning provisions for children with specific and/or additional learning needs are comprehensive and highly effective” (see Table 4.4; Item 8). The results of this study indicate that two thirds of the EC teachers were agreed, in terms of the effectiveness and the learning provisions they provided for included students, and 82.8 percent of respondents confirmed “Teachers who have students with specific and high educational needs receive additional support” (see Table 4.5; Item 22). According to these EC teachers, many schools are attending to inclusive practices. However, one-third of the study’s teachers expressed concerns about inclusive practices in their classes. Some of their concerns are presented in greater detail in the following paragraphs.

The teachers in this study said that support for teachers who have students with additional educational needs is provided by colleagues within the school, or other allied professionals who are available for consultation. One interview participant described this situation as follows:

We have excellent support networks here at school ... but there still never seems enough of that to go around. I don't know whether the Department supplies enough support [for schools] to cope with the ongoing need that is really out there. (S2/5)

Others perceived the support provided to be insufficient, making such statements as “inclusion of special needs children meant teaching was difficult, with inadequate [amounts of] support” (E8).

Additional support in school is timetabled and allocated to students “assessed” as having special learning needs. TAs roles are pivotal in attending to students on a one-to-one basis. When a TA leaves the classroom, teachers are left to manage the day-to-day teaching and also to meet the additional needs of “included” students. Early childhood teachers reported having limited time available to work with individual or small groups of students; as one teacher observed

I used to go home and think ‘have I had enough time to sit and talk to this child?’ I just have to make the effort now to sit at each of the tables to have a chat with students, even if it is just for five minutes to touch base. (W1/9)

In the EC classroom one-to-one time between teacher and student is compromised when students are dependent upon adults for support and when teachers are working with a number of students who have differing abilities, and/or high learning needs. In this study, nearly one-quarter of the teachers indicated they taught Prep students, aged between 5 and 6 years of age. In addition, 86 percent of respondents reported teaching a class size of greater than 20 students (see Section 4.3), and 52.3 percent of

respondents disagreed that their current class size facilitated teaching and student learning processes (see Table 4.5). In this context, of more formalised learning the organisation of relatively large groups of Prep children not used to structured learning, without additional TA and other adult support are of importance. In Tasmania Prep is the first year of formal or compulsory education; a time when the routines for formalised learning are established (Australian Government Department of Family and Community Services, 2005).

Another level of support, which is often external to the school, comes from specialists such as speech therapists, occupational therapists, social workers, educational support staff, and guidance officers. In many schools, teachers indicated that they valued professional consultations with other specialists, seeing these conversations as important for determining teaching strategies and suitable interventions. Often appointments, if available, are made on the basis of teacher requirements and student need, usually scheduled at either the beginning of a child's diagnosis or following a period of adjustment. However, as evident from the following comment that was representative of the interviewees' views, the unavailability of continual and regular access to specialists is deemed by some EC teachers to be problematic:

We have so many children who have speech difficulties, if only we could have a speech and language therapist. I think that every school should have their own therapists, professionals who can stay in schools for five days because of the numbers of children needing speech and language support. I think that has grown in the last 20 years. (MB4/9)

It was apparent even when specialist support is available, regular access is not always possible, and so support is often perceived as either limited or non-existent. Teachers valued the expertise of specialist staff and without adequate support

teachers were left to manage alone. In fact, one interviewee stated that some EC teachers are reluctant to accept “included” students. She said:

We have got – some staff that refuses to have a special needs child in their classroom – they just bluntly refuse. I guess a lot of these teachers want to be able to have whole group stuff all the time and with a special needs child, you can’t – not in early childhood anyway. (T3/12)

Although not all EC teachers reported coping in this way, it would seem that for some practitioners the practice of exclusion of “included” students may well be a last resort; a way of surviving in demanding times. Generally teachers are flexible; however, sometimes teaching environments force uncharacteristic responses.

One interviewee described the dilemma as follows:

It is no good saying that at 5 [years of age] everybody must be at school full-time because for some children this [requirement] is not ideal. Sometimes we cannot provide the programs children need. We don’t have the staff and we don’t have the facilities. I know there are children in my class who would benefit from a far more flexible program, but I can’t deliver that because I don’t have the time. (W1/8)

A lack of specialist support compromises teachers’ capacities to plan and provide individually tailored educational programs for “included” EC students (Smith & Smith, 2000). Inclusion policies aim for student equity, but in the context of a lack of specialist staff and specialist training (MacBeath et al., 2004, 2006) the support for students integrated into mainstream classrooms is limited, potentially placing these students at a greater disadvantage than if they were enrolled in specialist schools (Forlin et al., 2008). Some teachers in this study felt unsupported, in respect to staffing and resourcing, as they worked to include their student/s with diverse learning needs.

Teachers reported that it was necessary to be satisfied with what they can achieve, with the limited resources available to them. An excerpt from one EC teacher with 18 years teaching experience was indicative of the responses provided:

I think that probably what causes me the most stress [is] that I'm not providing for my new ESL [student] ... or [that] all the others [students] are missing out. Or [when] providing that support thinking that I have still got little Joey over here, who needs lots and lots of support and Billy and Fred and then there is my extension group. I think that not being able to get around everyone causes me the most angst. (MB3/8)

It is clear that some EC teachers were feeling stressed when catering for learning diversity of students. Added to this, were the frustrations of managing students with complex health –related issues and difficult behaviours.

Early childhood teachers are no longer managing students solely with learning related issues. They are also coping with students who have quite complex health-related conditions. During one focus group interview, an EC teacher with 29 years teaching experience noted her “*heightened sense of anxiety*” when she had responsibility for overseeing a child with anaphylaxis during a class excursion. The interview transcript evidenced her concern as well as her commitment to the child and family. She said:

My challenge would be one that is recent but also ongoing and once again, it is related to inclusion – [although] I suspect inclusion is not quite the word for the girl in my class with severe anaphylaxis. This child is in the front of my mind. Whilst feeling calm and confident that we have the structures in place ... when something different happens, like, for example, an excursion – it is constant checking out all the action plans. Making sure everything is done so that we are ready to deal with it ... Was there a phone link at the other end – is it difficult to get phone reception? Making sure we could have phone contact, with parents having the action plan with the Hospital before we left in case anything did happen.

[Prior to going I was] making people aware [of the child's needs] – While we were away from school I was continually keeping an extra eye out [making sure] that there was no chance [of a reaction] – wiping things down.

Even though we are used to dealing with anaphylaxis there is a bit of a heightened sense of anxiety when something is different ... when we're away from school. (S2/10)

Fundamentally, teacher education or ongoing professional learning, adequate planning time, manageable class sizes, and appropriate levels of support for teachers are pivotal to successful inclusionary practice (Forlin et al., 2008). In this study EC teachers reported they felt “challenged” when, in addition to providing a quality educational program, they were also expected to meet and manage a range of additional student needs in the absence of some or all of these supports.

Curriculum changes.

The final change aspect which was identified as impacting upon the teachers in this study concerned policy changes, specifically in relation to the release of curriculum initiatives and managing the changing curriculum (see Table 4.8). In Tasmania, relentless curriculum reforms provided the backdrop for this study. The extensive and ongoing nature of curriculum changes evoked a mixed response, with some interviewees reporting they welcomed the Tasmanian curriculum reforms seeing this as opportunity to acquire new skills and then, once ‘mastered’, to apply this knowledge in the EC classroom. During an interview one EC teacher expressed this, saying:

I actually enjoy getting a new curriculum. I think I would get really bored if everything stayed the same. I like it when we think outside the box. We have tried that [strategy] – that is not working really well – [so] let's do this. I actually enjoy the flexibility. This sounds very odd, I know, but if [a new curriculum] gives me another way to help a child in my class who may not be able to learn in the particular way, then that is a good enough reason for me. I just like to keep my mind open and learning. I just think I would get very bored – very stale if I just keep teaching in the same way I'd always done. (MB2/13)

Teachers who saw curriculum change as a positive experience perceived the reforms as a way to encourage colleagues, problem solve, and share ideas. They made comments such as the following:

Whilst I'm [an] experienced [EC teacher], I don't think I will ever stop learning. I have introduced new things into [my school] since I have been here. [In this school] EC teachers are learning together in ways that the rest of our staff aren't.

It's not that – we haven't mastered it – well we have mastered [the curriculum] to a certain degree – the first part of it, but we want to keep on growing and keep on getting better and doing the best we possibly can.
(MB4/6)

The findings presented here are congruent with earlier finding of MacBeath et al. (2004) who reported that British teachers welcomed curriculum reforms perceiving these as a way to revitalise their teaching. Nevertheless, other EC teachers in this study believed curriculum changes may have been compromised by inconsistent practice:

One thing that frustrates me the most is the differences among schools. It really frustrates me that [teachers] are not more of a cohesive group, [there are] differences in the teaching programs offered across schools. [Teachers] are not doing the same things. (MB1/15)

In Tasmania, the problem they perceived was that not all teachers were “doing the same things”. The release of the ELs by DoE to schools was staged with school principals deciding the timeframe for implementation by teachers. It is likely this staggered uptake caused problems for teachers, including EC teachers, who were transferred between schools over the 4 years of implementation. In addition, professional development for teachers was provided at the discretion of school leaders, a task made more complex because leaders were required to seek out DoE curriculum officers to assist with the delivery of professional development in their schools. Often there were not enough curriculum officers to deliver all the

professional development required, which saw some schools form clusters to facilitate staff professional development, but again this practice was determined by school principals and therefore varied as also reported by other Tasmanian researchers, Mulford and Edmunds (2009).

The context of curriculum changes which formed part of the context in which this study was conducted was likely to have heightened respondents' perceptions of the benefits of participating in professional learning and collaborative discussions with colleagues (see Tables 4.4; 4.7). These planning sessions, talking with and developing relationships with colleagues were seen by a small number of respondents as necessary to help EC teachers understand the new curriculum. As evident from the following response from an EC teacher with 24 years' experience, informal discussions with colleagues were considered advantageous:

Since I started teaching there is more sharing now ... especially in the environment that I'm in ... collegial planning, talking with colleagues. I find I pick up more from that than I do with any of the formal staff meetings ... collegial planning is a big plus. (N2/4)

Similar responses were received to the open-ended questionnaire items and these included: "*Having opportunities for professional learning*" (E2); "*Collegiality and professionalism of working in teaching teams*" (H9); and "*Working with a great team of dedicated, professional staff*" (H11). Teachers advised that collegial planning and professional learning were important, and the varying extent to which this actually occurred could account for differences among respondents' perceptions of the manageability of change.

Open-ended questionnaire items also provided evidence of teachers' perceptions of the downsides associated with the "*constant curriculum changes imposed from above*

which are never sufficiently resourced and become redundant just as you get a handle on it and are beginning to use it effectively” (H5).

Other EC teachers reported that the “*frequent changes made to [the] curriculum*” (BO5) and the “*continual change in curriculum direction, [and] assessment [requirements]*” (BO4) were challenging. Unrelenting curriculum changes, EC teachers report, did not allow enough time for teachers to “*get [their] head[s] around a curriculum – having it change again and again*” (BA6).

The pressure of implementing and understanding the curriculum changes was a challenge due to a “*lack of time to keep up with the new curriculums*” (E2); and “*the amount of time needed to gain an understanding of them*” (BO5); the “*continual change in curriculum direction, assessment etc.*” (BO4); and the “*pressures of changing reporting methods*” (E1).

Writers, including Birch and Smart (1990), and Burgess et al. (2010), concur that when teachers are inundated with multiple reforms they are reluctant to implement them in the manner intended. Teachers tend to “cherry pick”, selecting only those practices which serve teachers’ and students’ immediate needs (Bishop & Mulford, 1999; Williamson & Myhill, 2008, p. 41). In this study, some EC teachers regarded basic literacy skills as imperative, critical pre-requisites which gave students access to new curriculum content. One interviewee re-stated a conversation between herself and her school principal, saying that when:

The ELs were first released, I said to my principal “until my students can read or write, they can go jump with all these big ideas”. Units that had to have overarching aims written for them – all their jargon – I said, that “the students will not be able to access any of this program until they can read or write”. I said, “No, if I am going to use the ELs, then students have to be

able to access the program because if they can't access the program, you're wasting their learning time and your own teaching time". (W1/16)

Teachers believed they too were inadequately prepared for teaching the new curriculum. One interviewee expressed their concerns:

There are some aspects [of the ELs that] we have looked at as a whole school ... – but there are other things, where there has just not been that time to do it [at a school level] so it is either [teachers] putting their own time into reading about it or otherwise [professional learning] doesn't happen – there are only so many hours in the day. (M1/13)

Teachers' initial reactions towards curriculum change may lead to implementation "or to irretrievable rejection" (Burgess et al., 2010, p. 51) of curricula. According to one participant at the time of collecting data, the Tasmanian political climate meant more funding for professional learning was available to schools who implemented curriculum reforms:

If you don't follow the national curriculum or if you don't open up your planning ... be transparent, you don't get the money and the state is saying the same thing. No-one likes being bullied.

I would like us to take education out of government and let people who know about education manage education in schools, not be told what to do by political parties and policy writer. (S2/5)

Partial implementation of curriculum changes undermines the purposes of the change (Mulford & Edmunds, 2009, p. 28), and with any change it takes time to learn, to adapt, and assimilate new initiatives. For a group of EC teachers and parents, problems arose because the terminology was regarded as tortuous, making changes difficult for teachers to assimilate into existing pedagogy and for parents to comprehend. As one EC interviewee stated:

I always felt that ELs as it was presented to teachers was far too convoluted – teachers understood all the concepts but it was so badly written that it was so hard to describe to parents and that is the issue – that we need effective deconstructed, simple curriculum that is not so simple that it lacks flexibility and intelligent application but that everybody can understand it

and the teachers know where the directions are heading. It should be distinct and well written. I am sick of reading rubbish and getting rubbish handed to me. I find it insulting. (N2/4)

Negative comments such as this indicate the high level of distaste some EC teachers in this study felt for the curriculum changes. Like teachers in previous studies (e.g., Bishop & Mulford, 1999; Galton et al., 2002; Gardner & Williamson, 2004), most teachers in this study (87.5%) perceived a lack of consultation by policy makers “when making decisions about curriculum initiatives or change” (see Table 4.4, Item 12). Further, EC teachers indicated feeling insignificant describing for example, feeling that they had “*become a ‘number’ in a department rather than [a] ‘person’*” (BA8).

It is evident that, for EC teachers, implementing a constantly evolving curriculum was difficult, and increased teachers’ perceived workloads. Other authors (e.g., Acker, 1999; MacBeath et al., 2004; Mulford & Edmunds, 2009) have similarly reported that teachers are challenged when curriculum reforms and implementation occur in tandem. Largely, teachers in this study, like those described by Galton and MacBeath (2008, p. 15), were “struggling to implement” the curriculum reforms. In reality, “educational change cannot be achieved simply by producing new curriculum statements” (Murphy, 2004, p. 256). Rather, as Murphy (2004, p.256) recommends, “faithful implementation” may be achieved by assisting teachers to develop greater understanding through the provision of professional development.

Summary of RQ1.

In terms of RQ1, which investigated the change-related factors which teachers perceived to have the most impact upon them and their work, two key aspects in the domain EC Teachers as Practitioners, namely societal (e.g., family structures, student

diversity and multiple learning needs) and political (e.g., curriculum reforms) changes were identified.

The perceptions of EC teachers in this study support the case for curriculum initiatives to be introduced gradually, with due consideration given to the timing, and the magnitude, of intended reforms. Failure to do so sees EC teachers adopting some practices and disregarding others they deem to be of less relevance to students' learning. Individual EC teachers reported they feel stressed and pressured when there is little consideration given to the timing of curriculum policy reforms.

The data reported by EC teachers to address RQ2 are discussed in the following section.

5.3 Discussion Related to RQ2 – Highlights of EC Teaching

RQ2: What are teachers' perceptions regarding the highlights of teaching in EC classrooms?

Questionnaire and interview data were used to address RQ2. Teaching highlights were also analysed using three lenses with the domain Contextual Aspects of EC Teaching accounting for only 4.5 percent of the total responses reported by teachers (see Section 4.5). Although important to some teachers, the low frequency of responses in relation to context indicate that this aspect does not warrant further discussion (see Table 4.7). In the domain EC Teachers as Professionals, overwhelmingly teachers reported that they enjoy contributing to student learning (see Tables 4.5, 4.7, and 4.9) Furthermore, it is evident that the EC teachers also enjoyed developing positive relationships (see Tables 4.7 and 4.9). The following

structure will be used to discuss the key findings reported by EC teachers involved in this study that relate to RQ2 the teaching highlights:

- EC Teachers as Practitioners: Contributing to Student Learning
- EC Teachers as Practitioners: Developing Positive Relationships
- EC Teachers as Professionals: Job Satisfaction and Success

In the following sections these domains are discussed in greater depth, beginning with the most important as evidenced by the frequency with which they were mentioned by participants.

EC Teachers as Practitioners: Contributing to student learning.

In this study, teachers who responded to the questionnaire were almost unanimous (98.5%) in their agreement about the enjoyment of helping students to learn (see Table 4.5). This finding was reflected by interview data (see Table 4.9) and is congruent with other international studies (e.g., Acker, 1999; Fenech, 2006; Galton & MacBeath, 2008; Mackenzie, 2007; Marston et al., 2006; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2009).

The EC teachers indicated that they were satisfied when they experience, “*Success in helping children with learning difficulties*” (BA13), and moreover, when they had planned educationally sound programs which contributed to student learning (see Table 4.7). In addition, respondents indicated that they enjoyed “*Challeng[ing] children’s thinking*” and being able to observe children’s development. Teachers reported increased satisfaction when they had a positive impact on student learning:

I think that in early childhood, the children are just so enthusiastic and so ready to learn. I love it when little people can have ah-ah type moments

when they think “I know how to do that”, or when they can actually articulate their thinking, being able to share their ideas with others. I think I just love being part of early learning. (M1/2)

Clearly, possessing the desire and aptitude for working with students is highly desirable for successful teaching. Amongst the interview responses the most common reason reported by EC participants for becoming a classroom teacher was “Witnessing/contributing to student learning” (61.5% of the total responses). Further to this, EC teachers were satisfied when students recognised and articulated their own learning. They made comments such as: *“I think the best thing though is when [students] turn around and say to you ‘I didn’t think I could read’, or ‘I didn’t think I could write’. There is that first realisation that they are learning”* (T1/2). The following excerpt from a questionnaire response captures the essence of the EC teachers’ perceptions of their enjoyment of witnessing student learning: *“Really, it’s just all the magic little moments when things click and kids feel confident and successful”* (BO7). Although teachers indicated that they were feeling frustrated, stressed, and tired they still were motivated by student achievements. EC teachers stated that teaching was personally worthwhile and rewarding: This sentiment is captured in the following statement:

I love it, especially the prep area. I really enjoy it – children are honest, they are there for a purpose and I think it really struck me the first year I had preps. I had a little boy, who is now obviously a grown man and probably married. He came for the first day, at the end of the day - I said, “Have you had a good day” and he said, “Yep but I’m not coming back. You didn’t teach me to read, you didn’t teach me to write, you didn’t teach me to do sums and I haven’t written anything in my book yet”. Preps are just so enthusiastic about everything. It’s not to say that the 3s and 4s and the older children aren’t – I just think it is the openness and honesty about preps that I enjoy. (W1/2-3)

As classroom practitioners, some teachers indicated a preference for teaching in EC classrooms which they attributed to the nature of young children, their curiosity, honesty, and desire to know, to understand, and learn:

I have found it really rewarding working with young kids, you can see their progress and their joy in mastering something that they haven't done before, their enthusiasm for tackling something new. I have had a little bit of experience with grade 3-4 classes some years ago and even at that age, they were a bit more cynical and a bit of the gloss has worn off in terms of getting excited about new learning. Whereas grades 2s are still bright eyed and bushy tailed [about] learning: about the world out there, we can facilitate that ... so that is an exciting thing to be a part of. (M2/3)

Some EC teachers gained a sense of personal achievement from “*knowing you can help a child in some way*” (H3); such as “*Teaching a blind child to cut with scissors*” (BA5), and “*Those ‘light bulb’ moments when you see a child suddenly grasp what you are trying to teach. The [child’s] smile their excitement when they get it*” (H17). Mostly, EC teachers enjoyed “*Seeing children learn! Seeing children progress into thoughtful and valuable citizens*” (BA13).

In this study, EC teachers felt professional gratification from knowing that by “*Third term every year you can see the progress your students have made*” (D5) and that at the end of a school year:

Looking back at what the children could do at the beginning of the year and comparing it to the end of the year. All children show improvement. All children can and do learn. Wow, it’s a privilege to be a part of their education! (BA4)

Positive attitudes towards learners, such as those shared by this study’s participants, have also been found in other research (Marston et al., 2006; Perrachione et al., 2008; Scott et al., 1999). Like elementary teachers in California (e.g., Perrachione et al., 2008) who are most satisfied with teaching as a profession, Australian teachers,

have reported being satisfied with the “core business”, notably contributing to student learning and developing collegial networks (Scott et al., 1999, p. 287).

The data confirm Tasmanian EC teachers derive both personal and professional satisfaction when they witness students’ success, particularly when they know they have had input into that success. Teaching satisfaction is heightened when EC teachers know *how* to facilitate achievement and progress (Galton & MacBeath, 2008, p. 105).

The enjoyment EC teachers in this study so obviously experienced with teaching young children may be related to the fact that they were, in the majority, experienced teachers with many years of teaching experience. Thus the knowing *how* to teach for successful learning had become integral to their daily classroom practice. A less experienced group of teachers may well not feel this level of enjoyment if they are still trying to master the *how* of successful teaching.

For some teachers in this study, the ongoing curriculum changes discussed in Section 5.2 were frustrating, likely in part because constant reforms meant that teachers used to knowing *what* to teach no longer did. Nevertheless, there were other teachers, like those reported by Galton and MacBeath (2008), who reported enjoyment in their teaching. For the experienced teachers in this current study, a deep understanding of the *what* of EC pedagogy, meant teachers were discerning, implementing only those curriculum reforms which they perceived would benefit student learning. Thus selective implementation arising from professional ‘know how’ contributed to both teachers’ enjoyment and student outcomes.

As one experienced EC teacher in the current study commented she had been “*Working with children and watching them achieve and develop in all areas, and [she was] still enjoying it after 30 years*” (H13). These findings concur with previous research (Hargreaves, 2003) which indicates that having “professional competence” or know *how*, as well as possessing the understanding of *what* to plan, contributes to teacher and student satisfaction (Galton & MacBeath, 2008).

In addition to extended years of teaching in the EC sector, opportunities for professional learning also contribute to teachers’ competence (Kilgallon et al., 2008; Noble & Macfarlane, 2005; Patterson et al., 2004; Scott et al., 1999). In Tasmanian schools, professional learning is provided for teachers using various models. Sometimes experts come into the school to work alongside EC teachers, or time is set aside for on-site professional development, where school “experts” lead the staff. At other times teachers are sent off-site to attend seminars and conferences.

In this study, only a few teachers reported that “Participating in professional learning and collaborative” planning was beneficial (see Table 4.7). This response may be due to the ongoing nature of professional learning, or teachers seeing professional development as a regular part of their work, and hence not remarkable. The importance participants placed on professional learning was shown from their dissatisfaction with the perception that “*Professional development opportunities are diminishing*” (E6).

Having a desire to contribute to student learning can be considered a fundamental requirement of teaching (Dinham, 2000). However, as discussed in Section 5.3, in the face of increased demands, EC teachers in this study described their teaching role as becoming increasingly difficult and hard to sustain. They perceived high levels of

pressure associated with constant change within teaching and learning practices.

These issues, associated with the sustainability of professional performance, are not new, and have previously been reported by other researchers (e.g., Galton & MacBeath, 2008; Gardner & Williamson, 2004; Yost & Williamson, 2010b).

Nevertheless, it is important that, although EC teachers involved in this study spoke of feeling tired and stressed, the majority of participants reported that they were still enjoying their teaching role.

EC Teachers as Practitioners: Developing positive relationships.

In addition to the enjoyment of working with students, over half of the EC respondents (56.3%) indicated that increased satisfaction arose from developing positive relationships with colleagues, parents, and students, and making a difference (Marston et al., 2006) in the lives of students (see Table 4.7). These aspects, reported by teachers in this study, have been identified as contributing to “professional commitment” (Kilgallon et al., 2008, p. 45).

In this study, teachers agreed that opportunities for “*Building relationships*” (BA11) and “*Developing positive relationships with students*” (E1) were important aspects of their work (see Table 4.9). The essence of many of the participants’ comments was captured by one of the interviewees who reported “*I really love early childhood, the relationships are really strong and learning can still be lots of fun*” (M1/2). As other writers have stated, positive “relationships with young children are at the heart of the early childhood curriculum” (McNaughton, 2003, p. 248) and contribute to teacher satisfaction, which is necessary for successful teaching (McDonald, 2010).

Interviewees reported that effective relationships with children take time, patience, and commitment and, as a consequence, often leave a lasting impression upon EC students, and teachers, as shown in the following extract:

For me teaching is a passion. ... there is something about being a teacher that you can't explain. When you are reading stories and these little faces are looking ...waiting for the next word, with absolute wonderment ... I just look at them and think teachers really do touch [students'] lives but teachers don't realise by how much. I think I saw the impact on students when I was invited back to my previous school, to [attend] the Grade 6 Leavers Dinner, and what did students remember? Yes, their prep year and things that had happened in prep like when the gingerbread men were stolen by our principal. (W1/11)

This particular comment is revealing, in that it shows the long-term impact of positive learning environments and relationships, and the lasting impressions for all involved.

It is interesting to note that, in comparison to colleagues and parents, positive relationships with students received fewest responses from teachers in this study (see Table 4.7). Perhaps the teachers in this study saw relationships with others as being fundamental to teaching, and therefore, not something that warranted a separate mention. Alternatively, teachers may have failed to highlight the significance and rewards of relationships with children because they had actually failed to realise the importance of positive teacher-student relationships. In addition, it is possible that the challenges related to student behaviour as reported by EC teachers overshadowed the importance of positive student-teacher relationships (as discussed previously see Sections 4.6; 6.4).

Questionnaire data revealed that EC teachers perceived developing and sustaining positive relationships with colleagues to be a teaching highlight (see Table 4.7).

These teachers described how “*Staff connections and encouragement*” (E8) and

working with a team of dedicated professionals were rewarding aspects of their work. EC teachers valued team and/or grade level meetings which promoted a cohesive approach to planning and provided additional support during curriculum reforms. It is likely that the release of the ELs contributed to staff collegiality by placing a greater emphasis on staff collaboration and sharing. The ELs required that “all schools had teams responsible for facilitating discussion, decision making and planning regarding curriculum and in most cases, assessment” (Mulford & Edmunds, 2009, p. 34).

In Tasmania, with the implementation of the ELs, teambuilding was seen as important because it contributed to staff morale, by placing teachers at the centre of EC teaching and learning. Pedagogy thus became the teachers’ responsibility. Given that EC teachers reported feeling disempowered when they were not consulted about policy mandates and curriculum reforms (see Table 4.4), and that EC teachers reported that they were not consulted, the general principles of the new Tasmanian curriculum did have some benefits. These included the emphasis on teamwork resulted in positive feelings, as noted by participants.

This positive attitude to collaborative-based approaches to teaching held by EC teachers in this study contradicts other research. Troman (2000) and Woods et al. (1997) for example, reported that British teachers “collaborate under constraint” (Woods et al., 1997, p. 24), meaning that collaborative planning “was compulsory in order to aid restructuring” (Troman, 2000, p. 344), and thus not initiated by teachers. On the basis of the data reported, in Tasmania EC teaching colleagues united, valuing support from others as they strove to resolve issues arising from ongoing curriculum reforms.

Participants in this study reported being able to share, receive advice and modify their thinking and planning in the team meetings. Further, teachers indicated support networks were beneficial because, as one teacher said, *“I am always worried I’m not doing the right thing”* (T7/7). For the less experienced EC teachers who may have been unsure about the ELs, this type of support was obviously highly valued, as one teacher commented, staff *“[appreciated] those who had supported and mentored other colleagues”* (BA8).

Perhaps a positive result of the pressure of constant change was the encouragement of and collaboration among teachers. In the context of this study, the fact that the reforms also promoted team planning and collegiality was likely to have contributed to a rise in collegial interactions and networking between teachers. This finding concurs with earlier Australian EC research (Kilgallon et al., 2008) reporting that collegial support and professional discussions increase teachers’ morale and job satisfaction.

EC Teachers as Professionals: Receiving recognition and acknowledgement.

In this study, several teachers described “Receiving professional recognition/- appreciation” as an important contributor to their teaching satisfaction (see Table 4.7). As discussed earlier (see Section 5.2), there were participants who indicated they felt neither valued nor appreciated for their work (see Table 4.5). In the UK, Acker (1999) reported a similar finding, stating that “children, and sometimes parents, fail[ed] to appreciate – or even notice – what efforts [are] made” (p. 106). Individual morale is reduced when teachers’ efforts are neither appreciated nor acknowledged (Mackenzie, 2007). As one interviewee said: *“Everyone needs a bit of*

positive reinforcement, I suppose. Teachers just want someone to say, 'that was a wonderful job that you did this year'" (T1/6).

Additionally, there were a few EC teachers who expressed concern regarding their work and perceived a lack of encouragement from others:

I need positive reinforcement and reassurance. I'm feeling okay now but I need to know what I can improve on. I also need to know that what I'm doing is okay. I need this because I am working with children who are challenging. I was in tears one day – I said "I don't know what I'm doing. I don't think I'm doing anything right. Sometimes reinforcement comes too late". (T3/7)

Participants reported, however, that they sought recognition and acknowledgement for the work they undertook, reporting that “*Recognition of dedication*” (E5); and an “*Acknowledgement of [their] achievements*” (BO4) were important attributes. As one teacher noted, a teacher’s satisfaction is increased when, “*People offer appreciation*” (BO6). More specifically, these teachers indicated that they appreciated recognition from students and parents, as shown in the following quotes:

I suppose there is that affirmation that you get. I mean, I have got a drawer at home that is full of these little letters and things – “you are the best teacher in the world”, and you know that in the big picture you’re not but for that child, at the time that they wrote the message, you were an important person. The next year, someone else will be the best teacher in the world and that is fine but it is great to be significant to somebody and help them on their life's journey. (M2/3)

It's just when a kid comes up and grabs your hand – that in itself is rewarding. When a kid feels happy and comfortable within your classroom, you feel that by the way they are – by how they reacting in the classroom ... seeing the smiles and those kind of things. These things are just as rewarding as a parent saying “thanks”. (S1/12)

Tokens of appreciation may initially appear insignificant, but for teachers, as members of a profession, a lack of recognition/appreciation has the potential to reduce self-efficacy (Caprara et al., 2003), commitment (Kilgallon et al., 2008), and satisfaction (Marston et al., 2006). One EC teacher reported that perhaps one of the

most influential forms of recognition is provided by colleagues. She said, “*Probably some of the appreciation that matters comes from the system ... from us appreciating each other and supporting each other in the way you work as a team to all help children*” (S2/12). We know that when teachers feel valued and rewarded their egos are reinforced. Positive interactions are incentives for work commitment, with benefits for the both individual and the system (Kilgallon et al., 2008; Woods et al., 1997; Yost & Williamson, 2010b). Although no two school environments or communities are alike, teachers who work with effective leaders are better positioned to cope with, and meet school and community demands (Bishop & Mulford, 1999; Mulford & Edmunds, 2009). In this study, it was apparent that EC teachers are not looking for preferential treatment, or special favours, rather they seek recognition and appreciation for the work that they do, a yearning expressed by other EC teachers (Caprara et al., 2003; Mackenzie, 2007).

Summary of RQ2.

In summary, in relation to RQ2 which examined EC teachers’ perceptions of the highlights of classroom teaching, the domain EC Teachers as Practitioners reported the highest number of responses. Participants reported two key teaching highlights, namely contributions to student learning and developing positive relationships. To a lesser extent, within the domain EC Teachers as Professionals, teachers’ perceived receiving recognition and acknowledgement for their work as important.

In addition to teaching highlights, participants also reported aspects which decrease job satisfaction. These aspects are discussed in Section 5.4.

5.4 Discussion Related to RQ3 – Downsides of Teaching in EC

RQ3: What are teachers' perceptions regarding the downsides of teaching in EC classrooms?

The third research question sought to examine teachers' perceptions of the challenges associated with EC teaching. Questionnaire and interview data were analysed and coded using three domains. Fewer than ten percent of the total number of questionnaire responses to this research question were categorised as belonging to the Contextual Aspects of EC Teaching domain. These concerned changing attitudes towards teacher/school (see Table 4.8). Given the limited number of responses, although important to some EC teachers, these aspects do not warrant further discussion.

Questionnaire responses, within the domain EC Teachers as Practitioners revealed that teachers felt challenged by teacher-related (planning/assessment; managing the changing curriculum; and a lack of time) and student-related issues (students who are “included”; behaviourally challenged; and the changing student population) (see Table 4.8). Interviewees were asked about change aspirations for the role of an EC teacher. Data reported 68.2 percent (of the total responses) were teacher-related (see Table 4.10). Of these one-quarter of the responses were in relation to the perceived need for improved resources, equipment and facilities; smaller class sizes; increased numbers of support staff; and more time (see also Table 4.6). Questionnaire and interview data reported by participants are discussed in the following paragraphs.

**EC Teachers as Practitioners: Teacher-related issues -
planning/assessment.**

Questionnaire, Section 6, Item 30 sought teachers' perceptions of the "downsides" of classroom teaching. Of the total responses received, 43.6 percent related to planning/assessment and managing the changing curriculum (see Table 4.8). In this study, teachers reported that they "take a pride" in their work, thus it is suggested that planning is not haphazard. The following comments are typical of the responses received:

I think that if you want to teach properly, you need to be prepared and there is absolutely no way that you are going to do that – just rocking up here for 7 or 8 hours a day. I start at 8.00 a.m. and I don't leave very often before 4.00 p.m. or 4.30 p.m. so there goes your hours straight away and that is without taking anything home or [considering the] stuff you might do on the weekends. (M1/10)

Comments like this show the importance some EC teachers place upon being adequately prepared in order to be effective practitioners. The following interview excerpt is representative of similar views reported by other interviewees: "*We take a pride in what we do and we like to know that we are prepared in the morning and ready to start the day and we are organised*" (S2/9). Teachers perceive planning is a task which must be undertaken in order to be ready for teaching.

Teachers reported having to put in additional hours at work, as well as at home, to complete planning requirements. For the 31.3 percent of EC teachers (n=20) in this study who reported a class size of more than 25 students (see Section 4.3), the planning required to cater for individual learning needs in accordance with DoE policy is especially great.

Participants in this study saw classroom preparation as important and, in order to be effective and adequately prepared, EC teachers were willing to spend time on planning and classroom preparation at home. Teachers' perceptions concerning "how time consuming teaching was in their lives" is reflected in previous research reported in the literature (Kyriacou & Kunc 2007; Marston et al., 2006, p. 123).

The EC teachers indicated that time spent on planning for teaching had increased (see Table 4.6), even though the hours that EC teachers must work each week had remained constant. Teachers perceived a "*Lack of time for effective planning*" (H2) and that there are still the teaching responsibilities completed after hours. Generally, respondents agreed "*that teaching is a 24/7 job. I spend most of my home life preparing and there is always more*" (A5). Given the earlier discussion in relation to EC teachers' views of curriculum reform, coupled with societal changes and student diversity, it is hardly surprising that teachers reported they were finding it difficult to cope with planning and assessment (see Table 4.8).

It is possible that the timing of the questionnaire distribution may have influenced data relating to RQ3. Reporting processes differed from school to school and teachers in some schools were engaged in more comprehensive reporting procedures as requested and expected by parents/families, whilst in other schools less was expected so assessment was not as a significant part of the teaching process. This is consistent with the fact that some school principals, who were approached about inviting EC teachers in their school to be involved in this study, declined on behalf of their teachers, stating that the teachers were "too busy" with reporting and assessment.

Assessment processes, reporting changes, and time constraints were exacerbated when teachers were expected to report to parents using Student Assessment Reporting Information System (SARIS) a centrally-managed computer database. Previously, EC teachers had used Word documents and/or pen and paper as a way to document their evaluations of students' learning. Some teachers in this study reported finding this aspect of system reporting requirements confronting.

Nevertheless, when teachers were asked about the value of using computers for assessment and reporting, more than half mentioned that "technology had streamlined reporting and assessment processes" (see Table 4.4). Another group (40.6%) disagreed; reporting, for example, that "*SARIS [is] unwieldy and often faulty. [This program] loses data without warning!*" (H4).

For other teachers, concerns arose from a lack of technical support and training. The following interview comments encapsulate their concerns: "*I had some technical support but a very minimal amount – we had minimal computer training but I've got a computer literate family*" (N2/6). "*I didn't. I asked senior staff and then I would go home and my children would help me*" (N1/6).

Without adequate training, technical support, and knowledge it is to be expected that, for some teachers, technology failed to streamline assessment procedures (Ebbeck & Waniganayake, 2003; Qing, 2007; Ryan et al., 2010). Further, the efficiency of using ICT disappears when teachers rely on receiving ICT support from colleagues and family. Teachers also reported issues with time and internet access:

We were told our reports this term would be quick and easy but they weren't. They were a lot of work and having to complete [reporting] online ... now you have to have the internet on at home because you can't do it at school there's not enough time. I don't mind doing it [online] but it was

hours and hours and if you work out the equivalent extra [time as being] between one and two hours per child and you have got 25 children in your class that was about 50 hours [time spent on reports]. (W1/13)

These findings are congruent with previous research findings, which found that problems with technology had hindered teachers' assessment processes (Gardner & Williamson, 2004).

One teacher, with 24 years teaching experience suggested that in classrooms today there is a greater expectation for teachers to use technology. She said that her use of *“multimedia, computers and creating computer generated documents has increased. Mind you, digitally based equipment is much easier to use. It's much more reliable to use than the old mechanical drafting stuff which was more likely to breakdown”* (B2/10). This shows that at least some teachers possess the ability and willingness to adapt to technological change.

The demography of this study's population is another aspect which should also be considered in relation to the use of technology (see Section 4.2 of Chapter 4). Of EC teachers in this study 67.7 percent (n=44) reported they had more than 16 years of teaching experience. Of these participants most would have begun their teaching career in a vastly different technological context. As a result, some teachers may have benefited from additional professional learning and technical support. Such generalisations however should be viewed cautiously, because the majority of teachers in this study reported that they had adapted to the use of technology.

In this study, teachers expressed concern about the increase they perceived in professional accountability. As one EC teacher commented:

I could come in here and run the day off the top of my head without having anything written down ... but I feel better if I have actually spent time

committing my thoughts to paper and prepared things more thoroughly [knowing] that I am not just teaching, flying by the seat of my pants. (M2/7)

The following comment was also representative: “*Higher [levels of] accountability, with more students [means there is] more planning and recording of assessments*”

(E1). Underpinning assessment and reporting was an expectation that teachers would provide and maintain evidence of student learning. According to the DoE (2007):

Monitoring refers to a series of assessments done over a period of time. At the classroom and school level, the purpose of monitoring is to keep track of and analyse developments in students’ learning, assess their progress towards goals, and facilitate program evaluation to inform future planning and accountability. (DoE, 2010b)

In the UK, Galton and MacBeath (2008) reported that “teachers often spoke with bitter feelings about the combination of bureaucratic demands and external accountability that were driving them out of teaching” (p. 10). Resignation was not reported by the Tasmanian teachers involved in this study however, it seemed that bureaucratic demands were perceived as having contributed to an unwelcome increase in accountability.

EC teachers in this study reported that the threat of litigation was never far from their minds; hence, they perceived there was a need for detailed documentation. These teachers, like those in the UK, felt that the provision of detailed documentation was incumbent upon them as “proof of their professionalism” (Troman, 2000, p. 347).

Teachers’ sentiments are captured in the following quotation:

We found that being able to document things was really good here. To be able to see, in black and white, the level of support that you were providing and that it wasn’t whipped up overnight, that is, exactly what was on paper was in place. (T4/7)

Today it is necessary for teachers to be accountable not only for student learning but also for students’ safety and well-being (Hatch & Grieshaber, 2002). As discussed in

Section 5.2 in relation to RQ1, 98.4 percent of teachers agreed that changes in family structures had impacted upon teachers and their work. Participants were distressed: by “*seeing the neglect of children by [some] parents*” (H3); when students arrived to school “*hungry, tired and disengaged*” (H2); and “*seeing children not being given lunch every day at school (due to pressures on family) and then trying to contact these families*” (H13). Teachers explained that reporting neglect to a higher authority was disconcerting:

As a beginning teacher there was no way I would have called Child Protection and said that I was worried about a child without discussing it with the principal or asking if it was okay to do that ... as mandatory reporters ... someone has to have a voice on behalf of the child/ren. (T4/14)

The perception of increased accountability demands extended to all areas of teaching. For example, one respondent commented, “*the accountability has just skyrocketed, the accountability from senior staff, parents and the community, the Department and government*” (T2/2). This comment also indicates the range of stakeholders to whom EC teachers are accountable. One interviewee suggested that, “*teachers seem to be accountable to absolutely everyone*” (T2/2). It is clear that these EC teachers felt that they were under increasing scrutiny from stakeholders (Scott et al., 1999) and needed to ensure that documentation was completed in a thorough and timely manner. These EC teachers reported being compelled to justify their decisions. It was clear that the study’s participants recognised the need for documentation to provide evidence to support their teaching actions, because without it they could be held solely responsible for outcomes achieved, or, more concerning be “blamed for things which are perhaps out of [teachers’] control” (Galton & MacBeath, 2008, p. 9).

As the following excerpt shows, the teachers in this study believed that over the past decade there had been greater emphasis on teachers' responsibility for students' learning:

You know – it is easy to put results on the teacher. It is easier to ... you know, shift the blame down to where it can't go any further. Really I think everyone has to be accountable, not just the school or the staff – everyone has to share the accountability for the children's outcomes. Maybe I'm a bit more tarnished and think teaching is not as much fun because you are always trying to justify your actions, and stick up for yourself. I mean I'm still doing a good job ... I didn't feel this way 20 years ago, 15 years ago. It's just in the last 10 or so years, I've felt more accountable ... whether I am just becoming more experienced and wiser, or a bit more jaded – I don't know. (S1/3-4)

This belief is consistent with findings by Williamson and colleagues (e.g., Gardner & Williamson, 2004; Williamson & Myhill, 2008; Yost & Williamson, 2010b). It would appear some consideration by employers should be given to the contexts in which teachers work.

For some EC teachers, class size, and catering for “included” students and diverse learning needs, made it difficult for them to achieve the outcomes they had pre-determined for students. As one interviewee said, *“this year I have a Kinder/Prep, with my Preps being hand-picked because they had special needs or need a smaller class group, the flip side of that is my Preps haven't value-added. I had a melt-down”*. This teacher then reflected that *“their [her students'] social development was amazing ... that took a whole term or more [to achieve]”* (T1/15). Regrettably, this type of progress is not represented in the state-wide mandated Performance Indicators in Primary Schools (PIPs) test results, which monitor individual academic progress and achievements. In this context, where the identity of each teacher can be revealed and linked with his/her students' outcomes, teachers, such as this one, may feel devalued. Many social and personal achievements, which teachers view as

important, and for which they have worked hard, are not revealed in the mandatory testing undertaken.

Irrespective of a teacher's commitment, and no matter how diligently teachers persist with learners, some students will not meet departmental expectations or system "norms". Thus, when students lack the "academic" skills expected by schools, society, and governments, EC teachers, like some of those in this study, feel compelled to defend their work. As evidenced by the following exchange, teaching is changing:

S1/3: *Teaching has now become more of a political hot potato- one that can be used in different people's agendas - to blame someone for something not happening ...*

Researcher: *Blame someone for something not happening?*

S1/3: *You know – outcomes. It is easy to put results on the teacher. It is easier to shift the blame down to where it can't go any further. I think everyone has to be accountable for outcomes, not just the government or us, teachers – everyone, parents have to share the accountability for the children's outcomes. That is the feeling that I get at the moment. Maybe it is a bit more tarnished and not as fun to do because you are always trying to justify and stick up for yourself. I'm still doing a good job and yet this is happening.*

Teachers have always been responsible for providing educational programs, and monitoring student safety. However, this study highlights teachers' perceptions of the very high level of professional accountability, brought about by recent curriculum and assessment changes. Repeatedly, the most experienced teachers in this study reiterated that EC teachers are teaching under vastly different circumstances, in a very different world, when compared with that of teachers even a decade ago. Accountability should be a shared responsibility, involving teachers,

parents, and families, because of the recognition that there are many variables, that impact upon student accomplishments.

A study conducted in the US and Australia reported that externally imposed standards and increased accountability have seen teachers shift away from traditional methods of monitoring and evaluating academic progress (Hatch & Grieshaber, 2002). Hatch and Grieshaber stated that accountability measures “imposed on early childhood settings [exacts] a heavy toll”, on both teachers and children (2002, p. 231).

EC Teachers as Practitioners: Student-related issues.

The second challenge highlighted by teachers in this study related to students displaying increased levels of violence and aggressive behaviours. Specifically, participants reported issues such as physical contact from students with behavioural issues; “*the changing attitudes of children [towards classroom teachers]*” (BO3); “*an increase in behavioural issues particularly those related to [students with] ADHD*” (BO5); and being challenged by “*violent students*” (E5). For these teachers, and the students’ peers, managing children who were violent and disruptive was confronting and troublesome. A teacher with 26 years’ experience recounted her experience of working with a student who was disengaged:

For me, this year, I have had one particular student who has a very confrontational attitude and I had encountered him last year The way he deals with things – it was pretty much confrontation for those two hours we had together each week last year. So I spent a lot of time trying to think about it over the holidays; how I could work with him and build a positive relationship. Now here I am thinking that I don’t feel as though I have made a lot of headway after a whole year. In all my years of teaching, I have not come across anybody who is quite so confrontational in their approach to everything. (M1/14)

Similar perceived barriers between teacher and student have been recognised in previous research (e.g., Stephenson et al., 2000; Stormont et al., 2003; Tarren-Sweeney et al., 2002).

Teachers have a duty of care towards students, and hence, are required to provide supportive, safe, secure, and inclusive environments (DoE, 2008a). As one EC teacher said, *“I was really worried that I was crowd controlling half of the time and trying to make sure no-one was getting hurt. I didn't feel as though I was teaching”* (T3/15). It would appear that at least a small number of teachers in this study were not effectively skilled in proactive behaviour management procedures which would enable them to demonstrate effective modelling, problem solving and negotiation skills for students who behaved inappropriately. The data also reveal the level of distress experienced by several teachers who had been confronted with disruptive, aggressive, and violent behaviours. In addition, there were some teachers who expressed concern when students were exited or removed from classrooms. Typical of the responses received was the following comment: *“When I think of the kids who are behaviourally challenging I take it to heart, I don't know whether all those supports that are put in place are effective”* (T2/12).

Arguably, classroom teachers who have acquired insights into students' behaviour may be best positioned to support disengaged students. In these circumstances exiting students could be seen as a last resort. EC teachers vary in the extent to which they are resilient. For some, independently managing challenging behaviours may be stressful and so other school-based strategies are required. Of concern is the fact that 6.2 percent of the total responses to Section 6 Item 30 of the questionnaire reported teaching students with challenging behaviours (see Table 4.8). It is likely that, for

these participants, significant proportions of valuable teaching/learning time was being spent managing disruptive students, to the academic, emotional, and psychological detriment of other students.

One teacher said that “*there have always been those social issues where children have got all this other stuff happening in their background that produces [student] tantrums and explosions or emotions*” (T3/12). Although teachers have always been expected to be “disciplinarians”, what was most troubling for the participants was the negative impression left upon experienced teachers by a few 6 and 7 year old students. As one teacher said:

that you could have a 6 or 7 year old child basically telling you their rights or what you can and can't do, and that some children can be quite physical with each other and towards a teacher has probably been a bit of an eye opener for me. (M1/14)

In spite of their extensive experience EC teachers in this study were surprised by the attitudes and physical behaviours demonstrated by students aged between 6 – 7 years.

One could speculate that, as these students move up through the school, behavioural problems may increasingly become an issue for school personnel, and eventually the wider community. As indicated in previous research, the reported rise in violent and aggressive behaviours in the early years (Stormont et al., 2003; Tarren-Sweeney et al., 2002) has implications for ensuing classroom teachers, students' education, and their life outcomes, as well as EC teachers' perceptions of their work.

Given that most of the teachers in this study were experienced practitioners, it seems reasonable to expect that other less experienced teachers would be even more stressed by the need to manage disruptive student behaviours.

EC Teachers as Practitioners: Improved resources, equipment and facilities.

EC teachers who participated in the focus group interviews reported aspirations in terms of improved resources equipment and facilities (see Table 4.10).

Variations between teaching resources, classrooms, and schools are to be expected, and as the following comments provided by interviewees show, teachers tend to accumulate their own teaching resources:

If you're out shopping somewhere you see something that would be really good for a particular unit of work you buy it. That is why I have a truckload of stuff to move before I go to my new school. I don't buy everything but I have built up resources because sometimes you see things and you think that it would be really good and I would use it a lot.

You could go through the procedure of getting it into the school library but then everybody else is using it and you haven't got access to it when you need it. So there are some things you need to have of your own. (S1/7)

Twelve months ago almost to the day – I get a phone call and it is like “Do you want to do grade 1 next year?” I hadn't had a lot of built up stuff. I had some things from my mother-in-law, who has retired, who was a teacher, so I still had some resources there and some ideas, but this year, there would be probably half a dozen things that I have either seen or thought that would be handy. Over the whole year I have either purchased that myself or got them through the school. Now I am in grade 4 next year, so I have kind of got to start again with some of the primary things. (S2/8)

Other teachers in this study stated that “out-dated” or limited teaching resources required school staff to source additional funds to redress the shortages: “We have three fund raisers in a year” (MB3/8), and “I think it is all to do with ... being really aggressive in terms of looking for redevelopment opportunities and looking for grants and those sorts of things” (MB4/8). The success of these reported ventures determined whether much-needed teaching resources were available for teaching, as one teacher explained:

Well we raised \$14,000 in one night, it was fantastic – the money was for buying books because the quality of the books was really awful. You need someone in these schools who know exactly what they are talking about and who will stand up and say exactly what we need, and then set about getting it. (MB4/8)

The success of “fundraising” initiatives is dependent upon staff to plan and coordinate these drives. Additionally, when physical resources are limited, teachers often spend time creating teaching aids and resources, which participants in this study reported consumed a lot of their time (see Table 4.6). A questionnaire respondent provided a confirmatory comment: *“The time needed for finding and making resources, preparation and planning”* (BO10) is a challenge.

Fundraising is a non-teaching related task that intrudes upon teachers’ time. The provision of teaching resources and aids are fundamental to EC teaching, hence fund allocations should be a priority to ensure that teachers have the necessary resources in order fulfil their teaching responsibilities (Kaufhold et al., 2006). Teachers stated that they needed to generate teaching materials *“when resources are limited”*, or as another teacher wrote, when there are *“very limited resources”* (BO9), or when there are *“not enough resources to support children at risk”* (E1). Of the responses provided by EC teachers, perhaps the most telling example of a shortage of resources, and teachers’ willingness to source additional teaching aids, was provided by an interviewee. She said:

On our holiday to Canberra, we went and hired push bikes and part of the thing of hiring them was that you got a free gelato so we ended up having the ice-cream in these little cups. I went over and said, “I am a kindergarten-prep teacher and I collect all sorts of resources for the class”. He said, “Do you teach here in Canberra? I give those big gelato tubs away to the schools”. I just couldn't fit many of them in my luggage. Every time I go anywhere I am forever looking for things ... thinking is that something I could use at school? (T1/8)

Another area of resourcing is human resources, and in this study, like others that have investigated teachers' work (e.g., Gardner & Williamson, 2004; MacBeath et al., 2006), inadequate levels of specialist support staff were perceived as a teaching challenge by respondents. Interview participants reported a shortage of "*social workers and guidance officers and speech and language pathologists*" (MB4/9). Others indicated that "*increased number of children with special needs, but without proper support*" (D3) and over-sized class groups were not conducive to teaching and learning (see Table 4.5).

Questionnaire responses indicated that 52.3 percent of teachers agreed that class size was another concern (see Table 4.5), and during interviews 20.4 percent of participants supported a reduction in class size (see Table 4.10). These findings are noteworthy because of the early childhood expertise likely to exist within this study sample. As discussed previously (see Section 4.2 of Chapter 4) in this study over three quarters of teachers (n=49) reported holding an EC teaching specialisation, and, of these, just over two-thirds (67.7%) reported having taught for more than 16 years. These data contradict earlier US research, which found highly qualified teachers, and not the size of the class group influence the learning of Kindergarten children aged 5 years (Milesi & Gamoran, 2006).

In Tasmania the start of the Prep year is difficult for students as school attendance hours, expectations, and class sizes increase, and for EC teachers because of decreased staff to child ratios (see Section 5.1 of Chapter 5). Given the contradictions reported in the literature, and the small scale of this study, further research is warranted, in order to examine more deeply the impact of class size on student outcomes and teachers' work lives.

Teachers in this study reported that a lack of resources and funding, abusive or aggressive parents, larger class sizes, and curriculum change, society, parents, and, in some schools, senior staff, were concerning. Nevertheless, in spite of these issues, 98.5 percent of EC teachers were strongly agreed that they enjoyed teaching (see Table 4.5). It is plausible that being mostly “veterans” (Day & Gu, 2010), EC teachers in this study may be more inclined to simply go with the ebb and flow of change, having seen it all before. Or possibly, amidst all of these pressures, in order to achieve all that is expected, some participants, knowing how and what they need to do (see Section 5.3 of Chapter 5), prefer to simply close their classroom doors and get on with the task of teaching.

Summary RQ3.

In relation to RQ3 *What are teachers’ perceptions regarding the downsides of teaching in EC classrooms?* Data about the challenges of teaching fell into the domain EC Teachers as Practitioners. In general, teachers indicated that planning/assessment, being affronted by an increase in student-related issues and the need for improved resources, equipment, and facilities were “downsides” of teaching.

The final research question, RQ4 sought to examine teachers’ perceptions of the ways in which the issues teachers reported affect them and their work. The data reported in relation to this RQ are discussed in Section 5.5.

5.5 Discussion Related to RQ4 – EC Teachers’ Perceptions of the Impact of Change

RQ4: *In what ways do the issues reported by EC teachers impact upon them and their work?*

This section discusses the results in relation to the last research question about teachers' perceptions of the impact of change upon them and their work. Teachers' responses fell into two domains, and the domain, EC Teachers as Practitioners attracted higher numbers of responses.

EC teachers reported that change affected their capacity to work effectively with others, and limited time to spend on tasks that they saw as more central to their role as a teacher, as well as health and well-being related issues.

EC Teachers as Practitioners: Relationship issues - school leaders/colleagues.

In this study, most of the issues raised in this category related to school leaders, however a few concerns involved colleagues. Participants reported negative relationships with some school leaders; however, in one school it was reported that, *“Many times staff were made to feel like one of the students by principals as they lack the people skills of a proper manager”* (D5). Another teacher said, *“I think leadership people have to be more assertive about [their] expectations”* (MB4/16). In these situations a lack of awareness by school principals about what constitutes effective leadership may leave staff feeling alienated (Troman, 2000).

Nupponen (2006) states leaders require, “specific knowledge in leadership and management, both at the micro and the macro level” (p. 48). Many school principals, like directors in child care centres (Nupponen, 2006), are likely to have progressed through the teaching levels, rather than having obtained qualifications or specialist knowledge related to their leadership role. When leaders lack skills, teachers lack direction and motivation (Bishop & Mulford, 1996; Nupponen, 2006). Consistent

with the literature (e.g., Donaldson, Marnik, Mackenzie & Ackerman, 2009; Nupponen, 2006) teachers in this study valued school leaders who were decisive, self-assured, and demonstrated effective leadership and management qualities.

Given the complexities of schools, increased tensions and expectations reported relative to principalships (e.g., d'Arbon, Duignan & Duncan, 2000), school leaders who lack leadership qualities may benefit from continuous “ongoing professional development involving readings, and the use of internal and external expertise” (Silns, Mulford, Zarins & Bishop, 2000, p. 288).

Importantly, in this current study, questionnaire and interview data suggest EC teachers perceive school leaders as having a negative effect upon them and their work. As the following excerpt reveals, teachers can have a successful year when they work with supportive and effective leaders:

I didn't enjoy my year last year. I don't think many people did. It wasn't a good year for the school. It was a mixed up year. Things changed and they didn't change in a good way and we have another new principal this year and things are more settled. (W1/15)

One respondent to the questionnaire wrote, “*In the hierarchy of teaching you are considered a lower being because you have decided to stay in the classroom rather than climb the [promotion] ladder*” (D5). Regardless of their position, assuming that all teachers are treated with respect and dignity, possibly what is more interesting is that respondents reported satisfaction was derived from classroom teaching (see Tables 4.5; 4.7). When asked about career aspirations, responses included the following: “*No my family life comes first. I'm quite content to remain in the classroom*” (N2/7).

As found in earlier Australian research (e.g., Bishop & Mulford, 1996), teachers in this study had different reasons for making a conscious decision to remain in the classroom and have no desire to hold a leadership position.

An Australian study surveyed (n=3,000) assistant principals and subject coordinators about their career aspirations in relation to applying for a principalship in a Catholic primary or secondary school (d'Arbon et al., 2002). Female participants (52% of the total responses) revealed "the most significant negative factor is the impact on family and personal life" (d'Arbon et al., 2002, p. 468). Typical of that study's participants' responses was the following response:

I found great disruption to my family life, friendships and schooling;
I would not apply because of the time taken out of family life and the
expectations of after-hours meetings etc. Also because of the emotional
impact of making difficult decisions. (d'Arbon, Duignan & Duncan, 2002, p.
476)

Galton and MacBeath (2008) stated that "head teachers are now working harder, longer hours and within a more complex and demanding environment" (p. 114). This may help to explain why some experienced teachers in this study perceived that senior appointments were less attractive to classroom teaching, and as such were not a viable career option.

Notably, in addition to being deterred by the perceptions of the demands of leadership roles, EC teachers may be unwilling to forego the enjoyment they find in directly influencing children's learning (see Section 4.5 of Chapter 4).

Another teacher reported her dissatisfaction arising from a part-time principalship, which had contributed to a breakdown in communications between student, teacher and principal:

At my son's school, all staff [who are] on the leadership team [are] part-time [employees] and I don't think that works. I have seen part-time leadership teams and it just doesn't work because on the day that they are not there, [upon their return] they can't easily follow up with little Joey, who threw a cricket bat at someone yesterday because they are not present. So I really think that leadership teams need to be full-time to give the support to kids and staff. (MB1/16)

In these circumstances, it is difficult for leaders to support students and teachers following an incident, particularly if leaders were not present when the incident occurred. Miscommunication creates extra tensions for people who may already be experiencing difficulties within the school environment.

As the following questionnaire responses show favouritism can leave teachers feeling isolated and undervalued: *“Not being offered PD and leadership opportunities, [and] when [these roles are decided] ‘in house’ there can be a ‘club mentality’ [when] the same people are given opportunities over and over” (B7).*

When teachers perceive they are being ‘side lined’ by school leaders, there is a division between teacher, colleagues, and leaders. This problem may be alleviated when members of senior staff communicate regularly with teachers, as one participant explained:

We used to have a senior staff person who would always make you feel good. So every Friday afternoon, I knew I was going to get my planning back with some things like “How about you try this?” and it was always done in a really nice way.

Whereas now, unless you have a colleague next to you, you can go for weeks and weeks without talking to senior staff. (T2/8)

Other communication problems reported involved misinterpretations between two people. Conceivably some school environments, personal characteristics, and/or individual variables may also affect the ways in which staff members communicate.

In this study, some EC teachers had experienced poor communication practices, which had impacted negatively on the teachers involved. Further, tensions reportedly arose when there was a power imbalance, or when space was confined; issues which were accentuated by ineffective communication, as one participant explained:

I find it difficult getting on with a colleague. I share a room with a senior teacher. She insists on putting on her senior hat and she does things which make my blood boil. I don't think she realises she does that. She thinks she's being efficient and thinks she's being helpful. She overrides decisions; things are started, and then left unfinished. I come to class and I can't find things. She bundles up things and takes them home. I'm not a difficult person to work with; I get on well with other teachers. At the beginning of the term she was away for two weeks, we could cope, and everyone was relaxed. I've never experienced that before, it just really surprised me now much this person can affect me. She doesn't mean to do that, it's just her way. (N1/6)

In situations such as this, senior teachers may become highly proficient in their leadership role, but they may not be “aware of their own leadership style and how it can be developed effectively” (Nupponen, 2006, p. 44).

Although relationship issues are easily identifiable, finding solutions is a more complex process. Issues may not easily be resolved without skilful interventions. EC teachers contended that they had few opportunities in a working day to interact with colleagues (see Table 4.4). Thus, given that the ELs curriculum was based on dialogue with colleagues, the quality of the curriculum they provide would likely be compromised. These findings are tentative steps towards understanding issues around school staff communication. Moreover, given that EC teachers are, at the time of writing, undergoing yet another curriculum change the issue of communication is an important issue worthy of further examination.

Parents.

Teachers reported that working with parents whom they considered unreasonable was difficult (see Section 4.9 of Chapter 4). These findings are consistently reported in literature on the changing attitudes of parents towards teachers and schools (Brown et al., 2002; Galton & MacBeath, 2008; MacBeath et al., 2004; Stormont et al., 2003). Responses to the open-ended questionnaire items reveal that “*Meeting with aggressive and/or demanding parents*” (E10) and “*Crazy, and unsupportive parents*” (BA6) were stressful and upsetting for EC teachers. Of course, schools and teachers should not have to tolerate abusive, aggressive, and disrespectful parents. A number of interviewees recounted events which had caused them considerable distress. As the following statement reveals, some aggressive parents are perceived as posing a physical threat to EC teachers and students:

I found [the incident] very, very stressful but I had kept a lot of diary notes. When she made a complaint – I said to the principal that – I’d never had a complaint in thirty years and I would have this on my record now. He told me not to worry about it ... as he said “I get complaints all the time”. But it was all very well for him – it was on my record. In fact, yesterday, she got so violently abusive that the principal had her on “collect your child at the gate”. (N2/7)

At times such as these, it is evident that EC teachers rely heavily on the support of principals, or senior staff.

Even after 30 years teaching experience, this teacher reported the event, was “very, very stressful”. Presumably, early career teachers, and those with less experience than most participants in this study, would be likely to find similar situations intolerable, without the support of more experienced colleagues, senior staff, and/or principals. Furthermore, it is interesting to note the principal’s response: “*not to worry about it ... I get complaints all the time*”. Teachers’ perceptions that principals

will provide them with support, and manage difficult problems may be one reason for teachers' reticence to seek promotion to senior positions. Or as one interviewee suggested, her wellbeing is of greater value than seeking promotion. She said:

Maybe the money would be interesting but I've seen the stress that the senior staff have in my school and I'm really wondering whether being put into an extra salary bracket is worth it. (N2/7)

Because schooling is mandatory, schools are in a precarious position; on one hand a directive to "collect your child at the gate", or exiting parents from schools, may solve the immediate issues of difficult/aggressive parents for teachers. Yet, on the other hand, responses such as these generate other problems, such as increased tensions and reprisals. It would seem schools are in a "no-win" situation, with few options available to them.

The experienced teachers in this study indicated that they felt subject to increased expectations and changing parental attitudes, including parents' increasingly negative perceptions of teachers. One questionnaire respondent remarked; "*parents negative perceptions of teachers*" (H15). Notwithstanding these pressures, these participants had demonstrated their capacity to succeed, and their commitment to education was evidenced by their years of teaching experience.

It is therefore troubling when such teachers report frustration with the "*Arrogant attitude[s] of some parents [and their] unreasonable expectations*" (D5) and the "*Pressure from parents ... and their expectations are too high of teachers and children [it is] too much!!*" (E6). Another EC teacher was concerned when parents were unsympathetic and intolerant: "*Parents requesting that their children not be in my class because I had been un-well 2 years previously*" (BA13).

These quotations illustrate the “change in the approach of parents away from a ‘partnership’ or ‘covenant’ relationship based on trust, towards a more market-orientated, ‘supplier-consumer’ relationship” noted by Osborn et al. (2000, p. 207). Troman (2000) argues that “parents as consumers are seeking the best buy in education” (p. 336), as such, to some extent, this ideology may be perpetuated by schools in their attempts to sustain student numbers. In Victorian and Tasmanian Government schools, funding allocations are determined using the Student Resource Package (SRP), provided on the basis of “the size of the school according to student enrolments plus funding for special programs and government initiatives” (DEEWR, 2008, p. 56). Student enrolments effect funding allocations, and, as Hill (1996) states, “the possibility that parents will withdraw their children from a school of choice is a powerful motivator for teachers and parents” and, principals (p. 671).

In the recent past, some primary schools have attempted to generate a harmonious and “balanced” teaching environment by involving parents and students in class placements. Although this approach may be effective for some families and teachers, school-community partnerships may well alienate other parents, perhaps because of family, work and child care commitments, the proximity of the home to the school, financial constraints, or lack of transport. Further, in order to be effective, school family partnerships require ongoing collaboration between all stakeholders (see Section 5.2 of Chapter 5).

EC Teachers as Practitioners: A lack of time.

In this study most teachers reported a lack of time with 76.9 percent agreeing that, in Tasmania, non-contact time was inadequate for teaching related tasks, such as planning and resource preparation (see Table 4.5). In a study by Aratò and

Szenerszky (2004) “almost 50% of the [Hungarian secondary] teachers [in their cross-cultural study] declared a need for more classroom preparation time” (p. 132). Of course, the structure of EC teaching differs markedly from the fragmentation of subject-based timetables provided for teachers working in secondary schools, and national system differences may also be relevant in explaining the differences in teachers’ perceptions of time. However, in Hong Kong, Tsai et al. (2006) examined the sources of stress of Kindergarten teachers (n=113). Their findings showed that teachers reported that “having too little time to prepare, ... having too much administrative paper work ... and not having enough time to get things done” (p. 368) were stress sources.

In Tasmania, EC teaching is punctuated by a weekly release from face-to-face teaching, or non-contact time (see Section 2.5 of Chapter 2). Teachers agreed that planning (70.8% of the total responses) consumed a high proportion of teachers’ time. However, EC teacher interviewees provided the greatest insights into teachers’ use of time, with 41.7 percent (of the total responses) attributed to “Increased planning and preparation required outside work hours” (see Table 4.12). This finding is consistent with other literature (e.g., Acker, 1999; Booyse & Swanepoel, 2004; Galton et al., 2002; Hargreaves, 2003) reporting that primary, secondary and early childhood teachers (e.g., Tsai et al., 2006) are time poor.

When invited to respond to the accuracy of the statement, “teachers work 35 hours a week”, 41.7 percent of participants reported time was elusive, and there are never enough hours in the school day to do all that is expected (see Table 4.12). In this study interviewees reported needing to set aside a couple of hours on Sunday afternoon and evening for teaching related tasks. EC teachers’ prioritisation of their

planning is a very interesting finding, especially in relation to the considerable years of teaching experience that characterised this study's population. With 67.7 percent of EC teachers (n= 44) having more than 16 years of teaching experience and 20 percent (n=13) between 8-15 years, it was noteworthy that teachers continued to set aside dedicated planning time. There are several possible explanations for this finding.

Firstly, increased levels of accountability, associated with the release of the ELs, are likely to have increased teachers' planning time, as they implemented new curriculum documents, applied terminology, learning outcomes, and assessment tools. Being familiar with curriculum frameworks is essential, even for teachers who, like the majority of those in this study, have extensive classroom experience.

Another possible explanation for teachers' commitment to planning may be attributed to incessant curriculum reform. Generally, less experienced teachers use planning to document lesson content and the teaching strategies they intend to use (Churchill et al., 2011). On the other hand, it can be assumed that when curricula and learning strategies are unfamiliar, teachers' planning will facilitate their teaching and assist students to meet pre-determined learning outcomes irrespective of the teachers' extended years of experience.

Secondly, a further contributing factor to increase planning time could be that an increase in the numbers of "included" students may necessitate extra *Individual Education Plans* (IEPs) (see Section 2.3 of Chapter 2). The preparation, evaluation, and administrative tasks associated with planning a single IEP are time consuming, because reviews, modifications, and dissemination of reports are constant and ongoing. Careful deliberation, planning, and collaboration with other specialists and

previous teachers of the child concerned are useful but consume considerable time and energy. One teacher who shared a class with a teaching partner reported:

I have phone call planning sessions. Once or twice a term we get together and have a night of planning. We also speak on the telephone for probably half an hour to an hour twice a week ... just to catch up and that is in addition to our own planning. (MB3/9)

Teachers reported that non-contact time was reduced because of extra-curricular activities, as one EC teacher with more than 16 years' teaching experience revealed:

"I don't always enjoy all the 'extra stuff' Book Week, Grandparents' Day, Science Fair etc. which do impact on planning preparation time and add stress" (BO7). This statement provides some indication of the range of additional non-teaching tasks undertaken during non-contact time. It would seem there is an intersection between the lack of non-contact time for planning and time spent on non-teaching related activities (Gardner & Williamson, 2004).

To ascertain the possible ways in which EC teachers use their non-contact time, further information was sought from respondents about the amount of time spent on six teacher related tasks (see Table 4.6).

One interviewee explained: *"Here [at my school] I definitely don't get a spell, even at recess or lunch"* (M1/11). It would seem school days are full, and then as one interviewee said:

There are all the after school meetings, then there is all the extra time spent in the classroom putting up displays and things, then you go home and you start planning and if you plan properly, it doesn't get done in five minutes. (M2/9)

The message from EC teachers in this study was that the "spare" time in their work day is consumed with playground duties or other associated non-teaching roles of the

kinds discussed in the previous sections. As a result, planning must be completed at home.

A lack of time saw a small group of EC participants reporting having “less time for family” (see Table 4.11) or a reduced “*amount of personal social time*” (BA10). One explained her situation as follows:

I have been here until 6.00 two nights this week and then [at home] I have a whole lounge room full of stuff. I am filing [making] the end of year books for kids. So my work is ongoing it's after hours. But I am lucky. My children have grown up – I'm lucky in that way. But this probably means that I spend more time than I should [on teaching related tasks] because I don't have to get home to young children any more. For me my work is done in my own time – early [in the] morning. (S2/9)

This comment seems to indicate that the more time EC teachers have, the more time they spend on teaching related tasks, thus teaching can so easily consume the majority of teachers' lives, and this may be especially the case for those teachers who do not have the added pressures of family. For dedicated EC teachers, teaching has become so demanding that it now encroaches upon all aspects of life, leaving little time for other personal pursuits (Day et al., 2006). Not having time to spend mixing with others in a social way is detrimental to creating a balance in life.

On one hand, “older” participants said they felt fortunate that their children had left home and without these responsibilities teachers were free to continue to work at school. However, on the other hand, it is possible that some “older” teachers in this study had elderly family members, who were reliant on regular contact and assistance from their teaching relative. As well as becoming more efficient, teachers prioritise tasks according to their personal circumstances and needs. As one EC teacher pointed out:

When I come here – on the way to school, I am 100 percent focused on what happens at school and when I get home, I really do, literally, take off my school hat and become a mum and a wife but most nights when my children are in bed, then I get back into school mode. I think you become more focused and you are aware that there is a world out there besides teaching. (MB4/6)

This reported ability to manage diverse roles concurrently supports what Acker (1999) sees as teachers being “skilful at juggling” their personal and professional lives (p. 80). The time spent on teaching-related tasks by participants in this study exceeds the time that recent health and work standards stipulate teachers must be on school site and in attendance, that is, 35 hours per week (AEU, 2010). In comparison to other professionals, teachers have long and frequent holidays, but the level of work intensity reported by EC teachers in this study suggests that extended work periods could be unsustainable without regular breaks. Some interviewees confirmed that by the time their holidays had arrived they needed a rest, because they were either drained or unwell. For example, one teacher said:

It is not 9 a.m. to 3.30 pm., while the children are there, it is the 2 hours before the children come in and the 2 to 3 hours afterwards when they have gone, it's the weekends my time is taken and by the time the holidays arrive I'm exhausted. (NT1/8)

Another EC teacher did not have a break, but instead spent holiday time studying:

I spent my holidays in Melbourne last year, for ten days, going to summer school for music — working and when I came back here [to Tasmania] I had a summer school in Hobart. That was another three days to four days. Last weekend I had to go to Launceston for professional day on a Saturday. (W1/12)

Other teachers reported regularly spending holiday and weekend time preparing and organising classrooms, as one commented, “time is needed for setting up the classroom daily and during the holidays” (BO10). It is contended that some EC teachers in this study did not have a balanced existence. Further, this also points to

the level of resilience that many of these older teachers have shown, presumably having sustained this level of commitment over many years.

EC Teachers as Professionals: Health and well-being related issues.

Although a few of the teachers had moved to a job sharing arrangement out of family necessity, there were others who had changed to part-time teaching owing to ill health. As the following teacher commented, health issues were exacerbated when the teaching environment became unendurable. She said: *“Having a dreadful class and having to go down to 4 days a week in 3rd term in order to survive the year”* (D1). This finding supports previous writings which indicated that teachers would rather work on a part-time basis (SOS Report, 2010) than resign, or retire. In this study, EC teachers reported spending considerable amounts of time on their planning, and this was the case for those with extended years of experience with planning.

In this study, nearly one-third (see Table 4.11) of the total responses received from EC interviewees reported increased *“stress of the job”* (BO1), a trend which is consistent with other literature (Adams, 2001; Brown et al., 2002; Easthope & Easthope, 2007; Kyriacou, 2001; Tsai et al., 2006; Wilhelm et al., 2000).

The causes of stress reported were multiple and varied. In this study, stress was seen as an inevitable part of their work for many teachers, and this sentiment is reflected in the words of one of the EC interviewees:

Teachers work every minute of the day and after being on leave, I realise that we do even more so ... I know that when I leave the school ground, I have to go home and cook and wash up and then I might do whatever (other home duties), however, my brain never stops thinking about work. I don't believe that a good teacher actually does completely switch off [from their work]. (T2/8)

Such obsession with work is likely to increase stress and a sense of lack of control (Galton & MacBeath, 2008).

Although the majority of EC teachers in this study reported having taught for many years, nearly one-third of participants (32.1%, Table 4.11) reported experiencing “increased stress” within their teaching. This is indeed an interesting finding, and is in contrast with earlier literature (Fenech, 2006) that indicated “satisfied teachers experience lower levels of stress and stay in their positions longer” (p. 49). Kyriacou (2001), however, suggests that owing to the prevalence of teacher stress, differing teaching contexts, stages of career, sources, and ways that individual teachers may perceive and cope with stress, indicates this phenomena is worthy of further examination.

It would seem that for these experienced teachers the issues reported were perhaps tolerable, having not as yet reached a crisis point. Nevertheless, Fenech’s (2006) finding that teachers with lower stress levels remain in teaching longer, may act as a timely warning, and is an important consideration for an “ageing” profession (Gardner & Williamson, 2004) where stress can lead to early retirement, as teachers increasingly become dissatisfied with the profession (Brown et al., 2002). In Tasmania there is a potential for teacher shortages (DEEWR, 2010b), should dissatisfied ageing teachers exit classrooms.

Summary of RQ4.

In relation to RQ4 EC teachers’ perceptions of the impact of change upon them and their work, participants reported working with colleagues, particularly some school

leaders, and some parents, a lack of time, and health and well-being related issues as difficulties associated with EC teaching.

5.6 Summary of Chapter 5

The discussion in this chapter addressed the four research questions and was presented using three domains namely EC Teachers as Practitioners; EC Teachers as Professionals; and Contextual Aspects of EC Teaching.

In relation to RQ1, the domain EC Teachers as Practitioners attracted the majority of responses. The data reported by participants in this study indicated that the change-related factors that had the most impact upon EC teachers and their work lives were related to changes that were societal (e.g., family structures, student diversity and multiple learning needs) and political (e.g., curriculum reforms).

The second research question, which examined teachers' perceptions of the highlights of teaching data, showed that contributing to student learning; developing positive relationships; and receiving recognition and appreciation were important aspects of teaching.

RQ3 investigated teachers' perceptions of the downsides of teaching. All responses were categorised within the domain EC Teachers as Practitioners. The highest frequencies related to planning/assessment, student-related issues (e.g., students with increased and significant learning and behavioural needs); and the need for improved resources, equipment, and facilities.

The discussion in relation to RQ4 examined the ways in which the change-related issues (e.g., aspects linked to society and curriculum reform) reported by participants

had impacted upon EC teachers and their work. EC teachers reported challenges when working with school colleagues, leaders, and some parents, and a lack of time, and health and well-being related issues.

In summary, the majority of participants in this study were “experienced” female teachers many of whom were teaching a class size of between 21 and 24 Prep students. In relation to RQ1 participants reported that societal and political changes have had the greatest impact upon EC teachers and their work.

Remarkably, on one hand these “experienced” teachers reported that contributing to students’ learning and developing relationships were teaching highlights. Perhaps of greater significance is that EC teachers reported an increase in planning and assessment, a rise in problematic student behaviours, resourcing issues, and large class sizes were challenges associated with teaching in EC contexts. As a consequence of changes findings from the data revealed that difficulty with colleagues, senior staff and parents; insufficient time; and health and well-being related issues had a negative effect upon participants involved in this study.

The findings reported by an experienced cohort of Tasmanian DoE EC teachers makes a contribution to the existing research about EC teachers’ perceptions of change, teaching, and the effects these aspects have upon teachers and their work.

The following chapter summarises the research by presenting the design, implementation, limitations, and conclusions of the study. Lastly, implications arising from the study and recommendations for further research are presented.

Chapter 6

Summary, Conclusions, Implications and Recommendations

This chapter provides a summary of current literature, and the research methods and procedures used, and present conclusions in relation to the research questions. In addition, implications emerging from the study and recommendations for further research will be provided.

6.1 Summary of the Study

This section presents a summary of the importance of the study; the main categories and relevant subcategories used to discuss the literature reviewed; the research methods and procedures; and lastly reliability, validity and limitations of the study.

Importance of the study.

Over the past decade many researchers have examined young children's development and learning. However, EC education has been overlooked, resulting in a paucity of research and literature (Fleer, 2000).

Generally research on teachers' working lives has been directed towards secondary (Poppleton & Williamson, 2004) and primary teachers (Ballet & Kelchtermans, 2009; Galton & MacBeath, 2008; Osborn et al., 2000) or has investigated both

sectors (Day & Gu, 2010). Other writers have examined Kindergarten teachers' stress (Tsai et al., 2006) and sustainment of EC teachers (Kilgallon et al., 2008), but not these teachers' perceptions of their work more broadly.

In Tasmania the changing nature of Kindergarten (Kelly, 2004) and primary and secondary teachers' work lives (Easthope & Easthope, 2000; Gardner & Williamson, 2004) have been investigated but not the changing demands upon early childhood teachers or more specifically teachers of Kindergarten, Prep, Grades 1 and 2. Consequently, this study was designed to increase understanding of the impacts of educational changes upon EC teachers and their work.

In recent times, there has been a concentrated focus on education in the early years in Tasmania, as indeed has occurred elsewhere across the world. The importance of this study is thus its potential to inform government and policymakers, as well as teachers and researchers, who have an interest in the nature of EC teachers' work lives. Already two conference presentations (Yost, 2008; Yost & Williamson, 2010a), a journal article (Yost & Williamson, 2010b), and a summary of findings for teachers (see Appendix K) have been used to inform others of the findings pertaining to this study.

Four research questions were developed to examine EC teachers' perceptions of relevant changes, teaching highlights, downsides, and the influence these aspects have upon teachers and their work lives. The questions guiding this study were:

RQ1: What change-related factors do EC teachers perceive as having had the most impact upon them and their work?

RQ2: What are teachers' perceptions regarding the highlights of teaching in EC classrooms?

RQ3: What are EC teachers' perceptions regarding the downsides of teaching?

RQ4: In what ways do the issues reported by EC teachers impact upon them and their work?

Further, an adaption of the socio-cultural concept reported by Fler and Richardson (2004) and the Bronfenbrenner's (1976) ecological framework were used to analyse and present data using three lenses:

- EC Teachers as Practitioners;
- EC Teachers as Professionals; and
- Contextual Aspects of EC Teaching.

As discussed later in this chapter, data were collected using a mixed methods approach which incorporated interviews and questionnaires, developed following a comprehensive review of the literature.

Summary of literature.

A comprehensive literature review was undertaken, which revealed a limited amount of existing research in relation to the impact of change upon EC teachers, and hence; it was necessary to include relevant studies from other sectors of education.

Online databases, which included Education Resource Information Center (ERIC), Informit, Informaworld, and ProQuest were searched. The search results revealed very few publications regarding early childhood teachers and their work, particularly

studies involving Tasmanian or Australian teachers' perceptions. Generally literature reported aspects related to teaching and student learning. Research reporting teachers' perceptions, tended to use the term "primary", which includes rather than separates or identifies early childhood as a different sector (for example, Churchill & Williamson, 2004; Day & Gu, 2010; Galton et al., 2002 ; Galton et al., 1999; Gardner & Williamson, 2004; Hargreaves & Galton, 2002; MacBeath et al., 2006; MacBeath & Galton, 2008).

Three main categories and a number of relevant subcategories were used to discuss the literature reviewed:

Living in a world of constant change.

Change is an inevitable part of daily living. To examine the aspects of change which EC teachers' perceived had the most impact upon them and their work, the literature reviewed was categorised into four main themes namely, societal, educational, and technological and curriculum change.

Societal change

- Families in the changing world.

Day et al., 2006; Duncan, 2006; Galton & MacBeath, 2008; Kyriacou & Kunc, 2007; Mackenzie, 2007; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2009.

- Children in the changing world.

Arthur et al., 2008; Souto-Manning & Dice, 2007.

- Students with behavioural problems.

Atici & Merry, 2001; Marston et al., 2006;

Noel, 2010; Regoli et al., 2010; Stephenson et al., 2000.

Educational change

- Integrating all children in education.

Forlin, 2004; Kaufhold et al., 2006; Lowenthal, 1999; Marks Woolfson & Brady, 2009.

Curriculum change

- Curriculum changes and educational reforms.

Bishop & Mulford, 1996; Churchill &

Williamson, 2004; Hargreaves & Fullan, 1998;

Mulford & Edmunds, 2009; Poppleton &

Williamson, 2004; Wood 2004.

Technological change

- The impact of technology in the classroom.

Gibbons, 2006; Labbo, 2006; Postholm, 2007;

Qing, 2007; Ryan et al., 2010.

Teaching in today's educational systems.

To obtain an overview of teaching highlights and downsides, literature reporting data within the broad category of job satisfaction were reviewed. As discussed previously, job satisfaction is a broad area encompassing many facets of teaching, including teacher morale, sustainment, self-efficacy, professional relationships, and contributing to student learning. Given the influence of teaching context, literature

from a number of different countries including Australia (Dinham, 2000; Fenech, 2006; Kilgallon et al., 2008; Mackenzie, 2007), USA (Marston et al., 2006), Norway (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2009), and Hong Kong (Tsai et al., 2006) were located. In relation to the broad categories of teacher satisfaction or teacher dissatisfaction the following were particularly relevant.

- Satisfaction Kilgallon et al., 2008; Mackenzie, 2007; Marston et al., 2006; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2009.
- Dissatisfaction Dinham, 2000; Fenech, 2006; Scott et al., 1999; Tsai et al., 2006.

The effects of change upon teachers and their work lives.

Given that many aspects impact upon teachers and their work lives, literature reporting the effects of educational change were relatively easy to locate, and fell into three categories:

- Work overload Day et al., 2006; Easthope & Easthope, 2000; Galton & MacBeath, 2008; Gardner & Williamson, 2004; Kilgallon et al., 2008.
- Teaching related tasks Aratò & Szenerszky, 2004; Booyse & Swanepoel, 2004; Hargreaves, 2003; Tsai et al., 2006.
- Time and time related issues Day et al., 2006; Easthope & Easthope, 2000; Klassen & Chiu, 2010; Tsai et al., 2006.

As discussed in the previous chapter, perceptions of each of these aspects were reported by EC teachers who participated in this study.

The next section presents a summary of the methods and procedures selected for use in this study.

Summary of methods and procedures.

Data were generated using a questionnaire and focus group interviews. The research instruments used during the study were developed by the researcher and were informed by current literature.

Firstly, when developing the instruments, different types of questions were used to generate a range of responses. Closed questions enabled factual responses related to each respondent's gender, teaching qualification, years of teaching experience, current class size, and grade level to be reported. Open-ended questions provided respondents with an opportunity to elaborate or expand on issues not previously addressed. Secondly, Likert-type scales sought participants' responses to sets of pre-determined statements, and semi-structured focus group interviews were undertaken, because of their potential to compliment, and promote greater understanding of the questionnaire. Instruments were pilot-tested (Burns, 2000), with recommendations considered and amendments completed prior to distribution and implementation.

In this study, participants were selected using stratified purposeful sampling, which ensured representation from each of Tasmania's three geographic regions (North, North-West, and South) and five educational districts (Esk, Bowen, Derwent, Hartz, Arthur, and Barrington). Teachers in a total of 28 Tasmanian state schools were invited to participate in the study. Sixty five (n=65) teachers completed

questionnaires and of these 15 teachers self-nominated to participate in focus group interviews (n=6). The questionnaire response rate was 41.13 percent.

Analysis of data was undertaken using computer-assisted procedures. Open-ended questionnaire data were entered, and interview data transcribed, using Microsoft Word documents. Quantitative data were entered into Microsoft Excel spreadsheets, which were tabularised and quantified using appropriate formulae and the auto sum tool provided within the Excel program. Using the Predictive Analytics Software (applied statistical software) (PASW Statistics 18) package, independent sample *t* tests were conducted and revealed no findings of statistical significance between teachers' years of experience, educational district, class size, time spent on teaching related tasks, family, and student centred questionnaire items.

Reliability, validity and limitations.

The last part of Section 6.1 presents a summary of the processes used in relation to data reliability and validity, and outlines the limitations of the study.

Reliability.

In this study the questionnaire design the random placement of positively and negatively worded items was designed to increase the likelihood that participants would read the statements, rather than tick boxes without thought (Burns, 2000).

Focus group interviews enabled the researcher to clarify aspects arising from the questionnaire data provided by EC teachers. Interviewees had consented to participate, were drawn from the original study population, had completed and returned a questionnaire, and were interviewed by the researcher using the same

interview schedule (see Appendix J) which was seen to increased data reliability by minimising sampling errors.

Validity.

To increase data validity the questionnaire did not ask for any information that could identify participants and the provision of two self-addressed reply paid envelopes protected respondents' anonymity.

Content validity was increased with the use of both negatively and positively stated questionnaire items (Burns, 2000), all of which correlated to the focus group interview questions. Three EC teachers, two females and one male with varying years' teaching experience, volunteered to pilot the questionnaire and interview schedule. Pilot testing by these teachers was important because they were somewhat representative of the study's sample. These data were not included in the study because these participants were not teaching in the DoE schools.

As a result of their feedback, minor changes were made which enhanced the questionnaire presentation and focus group interview process (see Section 3.8 of Chapter 3).

Two independent and experienced researchers monitored data analysis, which helped to ensure accuracy of reporting. In the questionnaire, frequency counts, percentages, and mean scores, Likert-type items, and open-ended questions were used, as it was recognised that data obtained from different instruments and multiple perspectives would reflect similar themes, and categories, thereby confirming the instruments were reliable and the results valid.

Limitations.

It was not feasible to cover all regions of Tasmanian EC teachers/schools, so one limitation which affects the generalisability of findings is the relatively small size of the study sample. Although findings presented in this study may resonate with researchers, caution should be used when making generalisations beyond Tasmania. Nevertheless, the representativeness of schools was maximised, as the researcher based choice of schools upon the 2007 Tasmanian Educational Needs Indexation (as discussed previously in Chapter 3). Further, stratified purposeful sampling ensured the population selected was representative of the group under investigation, that being EC teachers working in DoE schools within Tasmania.

A further suggestion for future research would involve the construction of the three domains, or the conceptual framework used for the study. The conceptual framework proved to be a convenient way to organise data, allowing contextually specific aspects relevant to individuals and EC teachers as a body of professionals to be identified, analysed and discussed. Perhaps, one concern which may arise could concern the teachers' preference for thinking in terms of themselves as practitioners (and secondarily as professionals) rather than focusing on wider contexts.

Next, Section 6.2 presents the conclusions drawn from the study's findings. These are structured using the research questions, beginning with RQ1.

6.2 Conclusions in relation to RQ1 – EC Teachers' Responses to Change

RQ1: What change-related factors do EC teachers perceive as having had the most impact upon them and their work?

In this study the data revealed three change-related issues of importance to the participants, who were predominantly educators with extensive EC teaching knowledge and experience. These data were analysed and reported using the domains, EC Teachers as Practitioners and EC Teachers as Professionals. The categories identified were: changes in family structures; teaching a more diverse student population; and changes in relation to curriculum reforms. The conclusions based on these findings are presented below.

EC Teachers as Practitioners: Changes in family structures.

The overwhelming majority of respondents (98.4%) agreed that changes in family structures impacted upon EC teachers' workloads and responsibilities. The teachers indicated that there was a need for increased duty of care, and the provision of social and emotional support and education to students and their families. Teachers perceived that changes in family patterns and a lack of parental support for children's learning had contributed to EC teachers' work pressures.

More than 80 percent (84.7%) of participants agreed that "*Some parents treat schools as a child minding service*". Thus, in this study, teachers perceived schools to be viewed as family support centres, as opposed to places for education.

Participants reported teaching students basic life skills, tasks which in the past the teachers reported would have been the responsibility of parents. Almost 80 percent of teachers (79.4%) agreed that "*Society does not value nor appreciate the work that teachers do*". Almost all teachers (97%), additional tensions arose from multiple and wide-ranging learning needs of students; needs teachers believed have increased over their careers to date.

EC Teachers as Practitioners: Changes in relation to teaching an increased range of skills, values and understandings.

The integration of students with special needs into mainstream classrooms saw the greater majority of questionnaire data show that almost all teachers (98.4%) were in agreement with the statement that “*compared to a decade ago, teachers today are required to teach an increased and more diverse range of values, skills and understandings*”. Although two-thirds of respondents were satisfied with the effectiveness of educational programs being offered in their classrooms, many perceived teaching had become more challenging because of large class sizes. Nearly one-third (31.3%) of participants reported teaching a class of more than 25 students. In addition, limited access to, and guidance from, specialist support staff and resources was regarded by some teachers as compromising the successful teaching of students with multiple and diverse learning needs.

Notwithstanding the extra workload, the large majority of teachers (82.8%) agreed that “*teachers who have students with specific or high educational needs receive additional support*”. Generally, EC teachers were not opposed to inclusive practices, with many participants feeling satisfied when working with, and supporting, “included” students. Nevertheless, teachers reported that the demand for the provision of individual education plans (IEPs) had escalated. As reported, the development and monitoring of multiple IEPs and differing abilities and the inclusion of students with multiple and diverse learning needs had significantly amplified time requirements for planning and assessment.

EC Teachers as Practitioners: Curriculum changes.

For EC teachers, the recurring release of curriculum reforms was a source of frustration as they struggled to keep abreast of changes to pedagogy, learning outcomes, and new terminology. As a result, some teachers reported being discerning, preferring to implement only those curriculum reforms which they perceived would benefit student learning. Paradoxically, selective implementation was counter to one of the goals of reform, notably the standardisation of state curriculum.

In summary, the findings in relation to RQ1 were that changes in family structures, student diversity and multiple learning needs, and curriculum reforms were reported to have the greatest impact upon EC teachers and their work.

6.3 Conclusions in relation to RQ2 – Highlights of EC Teaching

RQ2: What are teachers' perceptions regarding the highlights of teaching in EC classrooms?

In this study, approximately two-thirds (67.7%) of the teachers reported having had more than 16 years of teaching experience, and 50 percent had between 25 and 31 years teaching experience. After much change and years of teaching, almost all (98.5%) participants reported continuing to enjoy their teacher role. It is likely, that over time, teachers had accrued knowledge and refined teaching skills and, as a result were relatively efficient. Teacher satisfaction may have been derived from knowing *how* (Hargreaves, 2003) and *what* (Galton & MacBeath, 2008) to teach.

Teaching highlights were reported under two domains, EC Teachers as Practitioners and EC Teachers as Professionals (see Section 5.2 of Chapter 5). Within these domains the three aspects relating to teaching highlights were: contributing to student learning; developing positive relationships; and receiving recognition and appreciation.

EC Teachers as Practitioners: Contributing to student learning.

Respondents were almost unanimous, (98.5%) indicating that they agreed that they enjoyed helping students to learn (see Table 4.5). In fact, almost 90 percent (89.3%) strongly agreed that this was the case. Further, three-quarters of the interviewees (75.4%) reported teaching satisfaction when they “*Witnessed and contributed to student learning*”. These EC teachers reported feeling motivated when they had a positive influence on students and seeing students achieve their goals.

Early childhood teachers reported that they gained satisfaction from “making a difference”, knowing *how* to teach and *what* types of programs facilitated student skills, knowledge, and understanding. Some teachers reported that a lack of school readiness by students often required EC teachers to teach students essential life skills. Nevertheless, EC teachers were fundamentally motivated by “*Seeing children learn!*” (BA13).

EC Teachers as Practitioners: Developing positive relationships.

In addition to the enjoyment of working with students, EC teachers considered positive relationships with others as a teaching highlight. In the open-ended questionnaire responses, 20 percent of teachers reported that developing positive relationships with colleagues, parents and students was satisfying. A similar trend

was evident from the interview data, with one-quarter of interviewees citing building positive relationships with students and colleagues as a main reason for choosing teaching as a profession.

Positive relationships with students was not seen by questionnaire respondents as a priority, when contrasted with parents and colleagues. This finding was somewhat surprising, given that EC teachers indicated relationships with, and the accomplishments of, former students left a lasting impression. These perceptions seem to suggest that teachers do value student-teacher relationships, although this was not clearly reported as a highlight of their teaching. This situation may arise from teachers' views that student-teacher relationships are considered as being fundamental, that is, a norm in EC, and thus not seen as a separate issue by participants. Alternatively, teachers may have perceived the poor relationships with some colleagues and parents were of greater consequence, and as such overshadowed student-teacher relationships (see Section 5.4 of Chapter 5).

Teachers confirmed that they welcomed opportunities to work collaboratively with colleagues, seeing these gatherings as supportive and beneficial. At the time of data collection, Tasmanian teachers were involved in a cycle of curriculum reforms, in the context of which working collaboratively with colleagues enabled participants to mentor, receive, or provide support to other staff. It is evident that these provisions helped to increase teachers' self-efficacy and sustain teachers' morale during the curriculum reform process.

EC Teachers as Professionals: Receiving recognition and appreciation.

Although nearly 20 percent (18.1%) of teachers stated job satisfaction, including receiving recognition and appreciation (9.5%), was a highlight of teaching, they generally viewed the recognition of teachers' work and efforts in a variety of ways. A few teachers, for example, revealed that professional satisfaction came from students' appreciation, conveyed in the form of tokens or gestures, or as words of appreciation from parents. Usually, parental acknowledgement was given in response to a child's progress or skill development. It was, however evident that although the forms of recognition and appreciation varied, teachers desired encouragement and some appreciation of their work. When teachers were valued they reported feelings of motivated and being professionally satisfied.

In summary, it was evident that teaching satisfaction can flow from many different sources. Most prominent in this study were: contributing to student learning; developing positive relationships with colleagues and parents; and having their efforts valued and appreciated. These aspects motivated teachers, and sustained and contributed to their morale and job satisfaction.

6.4 Conclusions in relation to RQ3 – Downsides of EC Teaching

RQ3: What are EC teachers' perceptions regarding the downsides of teaching?

One-third of the total responses relating to this question concerned managing the changing curriculum, and in particular, planning and assessment issues. The teaching downsides fell within the domain EC Teachers as Practitioners and within this domain two aspects were reported. These aspects included teacher-related issues

perceived to be exacerbated by students who were “included” and those with poor behaviours.

EC Teachers as Practitioners: Teacher-related issues in relation to planning and assessment.

Aspects surrounding ongoing changes to the curriculum, the diversification of the student population, the increased numbers of “included” students, as well as, the increasing levels of accountability resulted in increased time needed for planning, preparation and, hence, increased workloads. These findings are of concern given that the majority of participants in this study were experienced teachers who would, arguably, be able to manage such demands more effectively than their less experienced colleagues.

Interviewees described how the implementation of the ELs and the associated pedagogical changes had increased teacher accountability. Further, accountability for students had increased, with teachers perceiving this to be, in part, a reflection of a rapidly changing society. Participants perceived contemporary teaching to be a vastly different role compared to teaching a decade ago.

Secondly, the expectation these teachers would report using the state-wide departmental Student Assessment Reporting and Information System (SARIS), often with limited technical assistance, ongoing technological problems, and access issues made assessment and reporting time consuming and frustrating. On the whole, technology-based reporting had generated more work for teachers.

EC Teachers as Practitioners: Student-related issues.

In this study, participants reported their concern about large class sizes, and a perceived rise in the frequency of violent and aggressive student behaviours.

Teachers were distressed when students' behaviours became unsafe, necessitating students' removal from the classroom. A small group of teachers recognised the detrimental effect of student withdrawal on student self-esteem, learning, and life outcomes, and for these teachers the student withdrawals were a last resort.

Conversely, a few EC teachers reported that they were at a loss to know how to cater for students with extreme behavioural problems in mainstream classrooms.

EC Teachers as Practitioners: Improved resources, equipment and facilities.

Teachers reported that resourcing that they considered inadequate compromised teaching and hindered their capacity to support students. Interviewees identified five issues, which, they would like to see changed, if given the opportunity. Of these, improved resources, equipment, and facilities (25%), and class sizes (20.4%), were the most frequently cited items (see Table 4.10).

Teachers perceived that they were unable to cater adequately for the multiple and diverse learning needs of their students because of a lack of resources and specialist support. In some schools, outdated equipment, dilapidated resources, and large class sizes exacerbated problems for teachers. In these contexts, teachers created teaching aids or actively pursued additional funding through school-based activities and the writing of grant applications, in order to provide students with basic equipment and learning resources. Under these circumstances, it is hardly surprising that teachers

reported working on Sundays and outside work hours (41.7%), in order to complete essential teaching-related tasks.

In summary, EC teachers were challenged by the frequency and speed of curriculum changes, which they reported as having contributed to an increase in teacher planning and assessment demands. These aspects were exacerbated by students with behavioural problems, a lack of student school readiness, “included” students, inadequate resourcing, and large class sizes.

The impact of changes reported by participants in this study in relation to RQ4 is discussed in the following section.

6.5 Conclusions in relation to RQ4 – Impact of Change Upon Teachers and Their Work

RQ4: In what ways do the issues reported by EC teachers impact upon them and their work?

In this study, EC teachers reported parent-based relationships and difficulties with colleagues and senior staff, a lack of time, and health and wellbeing related issues were difficult for them to manage. These issues fell into two domains, EC Teachers as Practitioners and EC Teachers as Professionals. The conclusions from these findings are now presented.

EC Teachers as Practitioners: Relationship issues working with others.

Teachers considered developing positive relationships to be a highlight of their role as classroom practitioners, although over a quarter (26.3%) of interviewees reported parent-based relationships were sources of difficulty. In addition, some teachers

(11%) reported colleagues and senior staff were a source of distress. Teachers reported that coping with demanding, abusive, and aggressive parents was intimidating.

It is arguable that societal changes may be such that parents are finding it difficult to cope with the day to day challenges of life's pressures. For example, Siraj-Blatchford and Clarke (2000) note that for many vulnerable families day-to-day survival is a priority, usually taking precedence over participation in their children's education. Although parental life pressures are acknowledged, it is axiomatic that teachers should not have to tolerate abusive, aggressive, and disrespectful parents. Increased negative attitudes and inappropriate behaviours affect communities, schools and, have direct and negative consequences for teachers and students, as reported by respondents.

EC Teachers as Practitioners: A lack of time.

Almost 77 percent of EC teachers reported that non-contact time was insufficient. Of these almost half (36.9%) of respondents strongly disagreed with the positively worded statement that "Non-contact time is ample for my planning and resource preparations" (see Table 4.5). Focus group interviewees (41.7%) confirmed that in order to complete all that was required of them in their work, teachers worked 'after' hours. Early childhood teachers perceived there to be insufficient time in a school day to complete administrative tasks, classroom preparation, and one-to-one student-teacher interactions, and for them participate in professional conversations with colleagues. Teachers reported that non-teaching related tasks consumed valuable teaching time (see Section 5.5 of Chapter 5). Although Tasmanian teachers receive a weekly allocation of non-contact time, this is provided at their principal's discretion.

In the absence of any formal departmental agreement concerning the allocation of non-contact time, nearly 80 percent of EC teachers believed the present non-contact time was inadequate. Consequently, teachers spent additional weekend time on lesson planning and preparation, leading to a negative impact upon their personal lives.

In this study, “older” teachers, without children of their own at home, said they were fortunate because without younger children, they were free to continue to spend longer hours working on-site. Although EC teachers described the ways in which they had skilfully prioritised their personal and professional lives, for some teachers such strategies failed to alleviate all of the ongoing challenges associated with daily teaching. Hence, it was unsurprising that nearly half of the interviewees in the study reported that changes had impacted upon their health and well-being.

EC Teachers as Professionals: Health and well-being related issues.

Focus group participants indicated that they perceived that the pressure of teaching in contemporary classrooms had given rise to increased stress (32.1%). A few teachers said that they were forced to assume a reduced teaching load or find other alternative ways to cope. In comparison with other Australian states, Tasmania has a higher than average incidence of part-time teachers (State of Our Schools Survey, 2010).

In this study, 32.1 percent of interviewees reported multiple and varied sources of stress, with some teachers feeling a loss of control because work consumed “*every minute of the day*” (T2/8). Nearly half (46.4%) of the teachers interviewed reported that changes within the teaching profession had increased teachers’ stress (32.1%),

and eroded teachers' family time (14.3%), thereby compromising teachers' health and well-being.

In summary, teachers reported a variety of inter-related health issues that they perceived to have resulted in a work-life imbalance. Although, at this point in time, many EC teachers have shown they are resilient and able to cope with the impacts of change, regrettably there are others who struggle, especially when “*parents request that their children not be in my class because I had been unwell two years previously*” (BA13) (see Section 5.4 of Chapter 5). Teachers in this study who were unable to manage the daily pressures of teaching looked for alternative ways to cope, which included being compelled to take a reduced teaching load as a result of teaching a difficult class.

Conclusions arising from the findings reported by teachers in this study have identified key issues in relation to the nature of teaching in EC classrooms. The following section presents six implications arising from the study.

6.6 Implications Arising From the Study

EC teachers who participated in this study reported their perceptions of change, teaching highlights and downsides, and the effects they perceived these aspects to have upon them and their work. Key implications arising from these findings are considered and possible solutions suggested in the following sections.

The majority of EC teachers were highly experienced but were challenged by the pressures of teaching today.

As highly experienced practitioners, teachers in this study are likely to have possessed a wealth of experience and knowledge (Berliner, 2001), and hence already have established coping mechanisms to assist them in responding to difficulties. EC teachers reported being challenged by the pressures of teaching; thus it was seen as important to consider this finding in terms of the implications for less experienced teachers, and how they might cope with the challenges of teaching.

In this study there were few teachers with less than 5 years teaching experience, and gaining a focussed understanding of their views may, at this time, be problematic. However, a study to investigate these teachers' perceptions would be worthwhile. Further, early career teachers' initial teaching experiences leave a lasting impression on teachers and their students. Kersaint, Lewis, Potter and Meisels (2005) found "a significant fraction of such teachers resign before the first semester has ended" (p. 776) because they "place more emphasis on the time they are able to spend with their families" (p. 775).

According to the Australian Education Union [AEU] (2011), teacher shortages are likely, especially in light of the Commonwealth of Australia Government's [COAGs] Early Childhood Development Strategy [ECD] which aims to provide a national framework to guide actions which seek to improve the outcomes for Australian children and their families (Boston Consulting Group [BCG], 2008). A key strategy of the framework is to increase the qualifications of those working in early childhood contexts. The AEU (2011) asserted that:

Even before these goals, the National Children's Services Workforce Study, published in 2006 estimated that "a shortfall in staff in the sector of 7,320 by 2013. Nationally 32% of early childhood educators left their positions in 2004 alone, and that figure was higher for unqualified staff. Furthermore, in 2008 30% of early childhood teachers in Victoria were aged 50 or above 36", a figure likely to be similar in other jurisdictions. (AEU, 2011, p. 20)

It could be argued that society, community, families, and parents ought to assume a greater level of responsibility for children, rather than expecting schools, and more directly, teachers to remedy or address multiple societal issues. For example, effective "partnerships with parents" would serve the best interests of the child, their family, and teachers (Hedges & Gibbs, 2005). For the past two decades, the Tasmanian DoE has strongly advocated the value of family-school networks (2002a, 2002b) and, as such, the issue has been on the agenda in most state schools. This study shows that existing partnerships may not be as robust as assumed, as many EC teachers were struggling to cope with the current pressures being brought to school by young children.

Although there are a variety of supports which assist families, many of these inter-agency initiatives are accessed either by referral or through self-referral. Arguably, prior to the commencement of formal schooling, "compulsory" attendance at home-school transition programs by parents and students may assist children to develop basic skills critical to success in the formal years of early learning. This requirement may reduce the amount of time teachers spend on non-teaching related tasks, thus permitting them to have a more focussed approach to teaching and a clear understanding of their roles as EC teachers.

Further, it is proposed that in Australia the current push for educators within the Child Care sector to obtain higher qualifications may benefit EC teachers and students. With additional training, skills and knowledge, the quality of pre-school

programs is likely to be increased, thereby facilitating smoother transitions for families and students between the care and school sectors.

The constant curriculum changes had a significant impact upon the teachers and their lives.

Teachers reported numerous curriculum changes that meant they were in a constant cycle of change resulting in a lack time to absorb, implement and reflect upon the practices they were expected to adopt. Nevertheless, EC teachers were generally satisfied with the level of professional development they had received in the recent past.

EC teachers perceived that policy makers and teachers seemed to be operating independently of each other, rather than co-operatively to enact reforms. If mandated changes are to be implemented in the manner policy makers intend, then teachers must be consulted and given adequate time to become acquainted with reforms (Murphy, 2004). Without these considerations teachers are likely to continue to implement policy changes selectively, as some teachers reported doing in this study.

The study revealed a need for clear communication between stakeholders in relation to curriculum design and delivery. Consultation between stakeholders would be mutually beneficial, in that the documentation would be more likely to reflect practitioners' classroom expertise and policy makers' aspirations. Further, due consideration ought to be given to the release and timing of curriculum changes, thereby reducing the likelihood of selective implementation of curriculum documents and policy reforms. These considerations would positively influence EC teachers' work lives and indirectly affect student outcomes.

The majority of EC teachers expressed enjoyment in their classroom teaching.

The majority of EC teachers strongly agreed that they enjoyed the role of teacher. More specifically, contributing to and having a positive influence on student learning, and recognising student achievements, increased their satisfaction with their work. This finding was significant given the years of teaching experience reported by participants involved in this study, notwithstanding the challenges reported by these EC teachers they have remained committed to their work and, moreover, have continued to enjoy their teaching roles.

In Chapter 5 it was argued that when EC teachers know *what* and *how* to teach, their efficacy, competence, and confidence are increased, which in turn have positive effects on their morale, satisfaction and success. Teachers in this study also reported that, they had a preference for working with younger students. For individual teachers, possessing a desire to teach younger students, and with 74.4 percent of participants placed within their teaching specialisation (see Table 4.1) had contributed to their enjoyment of working in EC classrooms.

These findings suggest a case for ensuring that teachers are placed within their teaching specialisation. Early childhood teachers, where possible, should be appointed to EC classrooms. Moreover, given that Tasmanian EC teachers are “veterans” (Day & Gu, 2010) consideration should also be given to the appointments of recent graduates because of the pending retirements, and predicted teacher shortages.

EC teachers highlighted many challenges and some rewards associated with the inclusion of students with special needs in their classes.

One of the main challenges reported by the EC teachers was in relation to student diversity and catering to the range of abilities within the classroom. The extent of the challenge is compounded by a reported lack of resourcing in some schools.

In this study, many teachers perceived a greater complexity and diversity of learning needs within the classroom, which left teachers feeling unable to adequately cater for and meet the learning needs of all students.

On the basis that EC teachers reported student-related issues (see Table 4.8) it would seem that generalist classroom teachers do not have adequate specialist knowledge for teaching students who are “included” and behaviourally challenged in mainstream classrooms. Additional professional development would be likely to assist in addressing this issue, however, an increasing range and diversity of disabilities and learning needs would require that teachers attend multiple training sessions. Furthermore, the provision of professional learning is made more difficult when, at the end of each school year, students are promoted to a higher grade level and, in many instances, a different classroom teacher. Hence, professional development may not be feasible given the diversity of learners’ needs and the multiple ways in which teachers could respond to meet students’ needs. This aspect is exacerbated by a reported lack of time to meet individual needs and high student to teacher ratios.

Teachers were concerned about specialist staffing deficits which could be alleviated by an increase in the numbers of trained specialists. However, this is a point over

which schools and teachers have very limited authority. Interestingly, in the UK, MacBeath et al. (2002) reported that, despite an increase in school funding and government spending, many schools continued to find it difficult to cope with the increasing demands. This finding seems to suggest that extra funding may not address the resourcing concerns.

One possible solution to inadequate specialist classroom support could lie in “partnerships between teacher training providers, universities, schools, classroom practitioners and pre-service teachers” (Yost & Williamson, 2010, p. 342). Research by Yost and Boardman (2008) in Tasmania, and MacBeath et al. (2004) in the UK, provided evidence of how university-school partnerships have been successful in addressing these issues.

The *We Learn Together* Program, a successful collaborative venture between the Faculty of Education at the University of Tasmania and EC teachers (n=33) from 12 Tasmanian state primary schools, enabled fourth year EC pre-service teachers (n=36) to have extra time in EC classrooms, in order to focus on planning for children with specific learning needs. Yost and Boardman (2008) found partnerships, like those in the *We Learn Together* program, are highly valued by pre-service teachers, of benefit to young learners, and may be one way to alleviate the current shortages of specialist staff, reported by EC teachers in this study.

Additionally, due consideration to teaching contexts should be given when allocating specialist resources (MacBeath et al., 2004, 2006), specifically in relation to school demography (Galton et al., 2002), class sizes, numbers of “included” students per class group (Smith & Smith, 2000), as well as the professional capacity of teachers

(Forlin, 2004). Giving attention to these aspects may also provide teachers with greater opportunity for one-to-one student-teacher interactions.

Generally, teachers in this study were satisfied when contributing to the success of students, and seeing student achievements. They were not opposed to inclusive practices, but were finding it difficult to implement inclusion as intended by Tasmanian DoE policy, without adequate support and resources.

In summary, teachers reported increasing diversity of learner needs exacerbated by an increase in the numbers of “included” students. The findings suggest that the provision of optimal learning opportunities for all students requires that schools and teachers are adequately supported and resourced.

Managing students’ dysfunctional behaviours was an issue for some teachers.

Although students with dysfunctional behaviours are in the minority, teachers reported that managing these behaviours was time consuming. Teachers perceived the increase in such behaviours, including aggression, to be challenging and detrimental to classroom safety.

Participants reported their reluctance to relocate students because relocation created other tensions, including interruption to student learning and the potential for social isolation. Although these are valid concerns, it would seem that, for the majority of students, relocation of some students serves two purposes. Firstly, relocation respects class safety and student well-being (DoE, 2008a), and, secondly, exiting students allows teachers to focus on teaching (Galton & MacBeath, 2008), without the

distraction of coping with negative behaviours. Relocations of disruptive students may well be the best option available to teachers.

Teachers reported an increase in the levels of aggressive and abusive behaviours, irrespective of the many social skills programs and behaviour management approaches available to them. Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed:

- Given the evidence of an upward trend in inappropriate behaviours in EC classrooms, additional professional learning about preventative or proactive strategies may assist teachers to identify behavioural triggers in advance of student outbursts. Training must be strategic, focussing directly upon children aged 4 – 8 years, because strategies that assist older students are generally not suitable in EC classrooms. In this way, EC teachers may be better equipped to cope with the challenges associated with increasing behavioural problems.
- For those parents or carers of students identified as having behavioural problems, initiatives such as those offered by the Early Years, Child Family Services and Family Futures Tasmania may benefit the child, family and teachers by providing parents and carers with additional support and coping strategies.

Time was a premium for all EC teachers, with many teachers reporting working outside work hours.

Many teachers reported insufficient non-contact time within the school week, required them to work for extended time outside designated work hours (see Section

5.5 of Chapter 5). Teachers perceived that increased planning, a lack of support staff, lack of time during the school day, and meetings consumed their time. Teachers reported working longer hours to cope with the changing nature of teaching.

Notwithstanding these issues, it is important that consideration be given to the use, duration, and allocation of support staff and the quantity and quality of non-contact time.

For EC teachers, non-contact time should not be allocated at the discretion of the principal; rather, it is contended that minimal weekly non-contact time should be mandated. Although teachers may continue to work after hours, for some the mandating of non-contact hours could alleviate the time-related pressures identified by participants in this study.

In summary, in terms of renewing the profession and retaining beginning teachers the mandating of non-contact hours should be considered by the DoE and its policy advisers.

Some teachers reported signs of stress-related illnesses owing to the pressures of teaching in EC classrooms.

Nearly one-third of the participants reported increased stress, health, and well-being related issues that they attributed to not having enough time for non-work activity. The fact that experienced teachers, like those in this study, perceive increases in work-related stress augurs poorly for less experienced teachers, and is potentially a significant problem given the ageing teaching workforce in Tasmania.

It is interesting to note that despite teachers reporting increased sickness, fatigue, and stress, a few participants had continued to teach by taking a reduced teaching load. Elsewhere, such as in the UK, teachers reporting stress and health related problems have either retired or resigned from their teaching positions. This pattern has wider implications for the attraction and retention of teachers, and for the professional standing of teachers.

Declining status of teaching as a profession positions it as a less viable career option, and hence an increase in the difficulty of attracting new entrants and retaining early career teachers may be an issue (Coombs Richardson et al., 2007; DEEWR, 2008). Increasing stress levels experienced by teachers are likely to exacerbate these problems. Owen, Kos and McKenzie (2008), reporting on the Australian teaching workforce, state that “the moves towards a common national starting age for school, and closer integration of early childhood education and primary schooling, are increasing the need for more qualified teachers in the provision of education for this age group” (p. 68). In Tasmania, the inevitable retirement of an ageing teaching profession may lead to shortages across the EC sector.

Teachers need to be proactive, seeking strategies and ways to alleviate some of the stress-related illnesses they reported. Employers, also, should address some of the aspects, reported by teachers (e.g., increased student behavioural problems, students who are included, class sizes and time-related issues) (see Chapter 5). Attending to these considerations could help to alleviate some of the health and well-being issues reported by the EC teachers.

In summary, the data suggest that while teachers are perceived to be coping, the pressures they endure will continue. Therein lies the potential for teacher shortages,

as dissatisfied “veterans” (Day & Gu, 2010) exit EC classrooms taking with them a wealth of knowledge and expertise; at the same time, younger entrants to the profession find alternative career options more attractive than teaching.

6.7 Recommendations for Further Research

The findings of this study have reported EC teachers’ perceptions of and insights into changes, highlights and downsides of teaching, and the impacts of these aspects upon Tasmanian EC teachers and their work lives. It is anticipated that the issues identified by participants will provide a basis for further discussion and research. Arising from this study, six recommendations for further research are discussed.

- Further research would be beneficial in examining EC teachers’ perceptions and strategies for adequately using non-contact time. In this study teachers were agreed that non-contact time was inadequate and provided an indication of the amount of time taken to complete specific teacher-related activities, thus an investigation of alternative models of non-contact time may be prudent. Specifically, it may be useful to examine whether weekly or fortnightly allocations or banking non-contact time for use at a particular time of the year (e.g., reporting) might prove beneficial to teachers and their use of non-contact time.
- Research to compare the perceptions of the cohort of DoE EC teachers in this study with those working in Catholic or Independent schools in relation to planning time and the tasks teachers perceive to consume the greatest amount of time would be useful. Findings from this type of study would assist in ascertaining whether departmental teachers spend disproportionate amounts of time planning, in comparison to other sectors

of education. Further, insights into the strategies teachers employ for streamlining planning may be beneficial. Further research inviting EC teachers in Independent and Catholic schools to participate in a study would be appropriate in order to ascertain whether the changing attitudes of students and families are congruent with the findings from this study. A study of this type could also identify similarities and differences in teachers' perceptions of parental and student attitudes towards teachers and schools.

- A replication of this study, extended to other Tasmanian regions not included (e.g., West and East coasts), or more isolated schools, such as Flinders and/or King Island, or under-represented areas within this study (e.g., Southern region) would add to the existing data, providing a more comprehensive view of Tasmanian EC teachers' perceptions of change.
- The study population was comprised of mainly very experienced EC teachers. It would be appropriate therefore, to investigate the views of early career EC teachers with the aim of ascertaining their perceptions of EC teaching. A study of this type would enable comparisons and contrasts to be drawn between the two cohorts.
- It is understandable that teachers report frustration with having to manage students who are easily distracted, disruptive and aggressive. A more detailed examination of young children's behaviours is warranted, specifically a study to investigate the types of student behaviours that concern EC teachers and the types of strategies teachers use to cope with such behaviour.

- The concurrent release, in 2010, of two national curriculum reforms, namely the draft national K-12 Australian Curriculum documents (English, History, Maths, and Science), and the first national Belonging, Being and Becoming Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) document, will increasingly affect Tasmanian EC teachers. The EYLF, released in May 2010, is part of the COAG's national reform for EC education and care, a framework that will inform and guide the practices of educators of children aged from birth to 5 years of age. In Tasmania, research investigating how EC Kindergarten teachers manage and implement these reforms would be beneficial to curriculum writers, having the potential to reveal whether or not one document is used or preferred than another. Insights from Kindergarten teachers will be of significance, given that both documents may be used with 4 year olds in Tasmania.

6.8 Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to investigate EC teachers' perceptions of teaching in Tasmanian EC classrooms. In particular the project was designed to investigate EC teachers' perceptions of change, the highlights and downsides of teaching, and the impact of the issues reported upon EC teachers and their work. Given the relative small scale of this study, care must be taken when making generalisations: however, it is contended that these findings will provide a basis for further discussion and research into the perspectives of Tasmanian DoE EC teachers, because the sharing of knowledge and dissemination of information has the potential to affect the work

lives of EC practitioners, as a body of professionals working across a range of differing educational contexts.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Ethics: Letter of Approval to Conduct Research

COPY

Private Bag 01 Hobart
Tasmania 7001 Australia
Telephone (03) 6226 2764
Facsimile (03) 6226 7148
Marilyn.Knott@utas.edu.au
<http://www.research.utas.edu.au/index.htm>



MEMORANDUM

HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (TASMANIA) NETWORK

MINIMAL RISK ETHICS APPLICATION APPROVAL

18 December 2007

Dr Margot Boardman
Education
Private Bag 1307
Launceston

Ethics reference: H9818

Teaching today - what's it really like? Early childhood Educators' professional and personal challenges.

Student: Helen Yost

Dear Dr Boardman

Acting on a mandate from the Tasmania Social Sciences HREC, the Chair of the committee considered and approved the above project on 16 December 2007.

All committees operating under the Human Research Ethics Committee (Tasmania) Network are registered and required to comply with the *National Statement on the Ethical Conduct in Research Involving Humans 1999* (NHMRC guidelines).

Therefore, the Chief Investigator's responsibility is to ensure that:

- 1) All researchers listed on the application comply with HREC approved application.
- 2) Modifications to the application do not proceed until approval is obtained in writing from the HREC.
- 3) The confidentiality and anonymity of all research subjects is maintained at all times, except as required by law.
- 4) Clause 2.37 of the *National Statement* states:
An HREC shall, as a condition of approval of each protocol, require that researchers immediately report anything which might warrant review of ethical approval of the protocol, including:
 - a) *Serious or unexpected adverse effects on participants;*
 - b) *Proposed changes in the application; and*
 - c) *Unforeseen events that might affect continued ethical acceptability of the project.*

The report must be lodged within 24 hours of the event to the Ethics Executive Officer who will report to the Chairs.

A PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM IN CONJUNCTION WITH THE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

- 5) All participants must be provided with the current Information Sheet and Consent form as approved by the Ethics Committee.
- 6) The Committee is notified if any investigators are added to, or cease involvement with, the project.
- 7) This study has approval for four years contingent upon annual review. An *Annual Report* is to be provided on the anniversary date of your approval. Your first report is due [12 months from 'Ethics Committee Approval' date]. You will be sent a courtesy reminder by email closer to this due date.
Clause 2.35 of the National Statement states:
As a minimum an HREC must require at regular periods, at least annually, reports from principal researchers on matters including:
 - a) *Progress to date or outcome in case of completed research;*
 - b) *Maintenance and security of records;*
 - c) *Compliance with the approved protocol, and*
 - d) *Compliance with any conditions of approval.*
- 8) A *Final Report* and a copy of the published material, either in full or abstract, must be provided at the end of project.

Yours sincerely



for Ethics Executive Officer

Appendix B

Information Letter to Tasmanian Principals

Letter to Principals

Locked Bag 1308 Launceston

Tasmania, 7250 Australia

Telephone: (03) 63243144 Facsimile (03) 63243302



FACULTY OF EDUCATION

RESEARCH PROJECT:
Teaching today what's it really like?
Early childhood educators' professional and personal challenges

Dear *(name of principal to be inserted)*,

This research project has been designed to investigate early childhood teacher's perceptions of teaching. As you would be aware our profession is undergoing numerous changes and teachers are being challenged both professionally and personally. Many teachers find it difficult to maintain job satisfaction and as a result may experience stress and burnout, or leave the profession before they reach retirement age. These trends have serious repercussions on the status and future of the teaching profession. This research project aims to provide insights by gathering data from educators currently teaching in early childhood contexts.

To enable me to gather relevant information for the study titled ***Teaching today what's it really like? Early childhood educators' professional and personal, challenges***, in 2008 I will be undertaking questionnaire and group interviews as data gathering processes, to investigate teachers' perceptions of teaching in early childhood classrooms, and the impact of 'change' (societal, economic, political and technological) on teacher's roles and responsibilities. I am seeking your approval for early childhood teachers in your school to be part of this study and to participate in the research process.

Data Gathering Procedures:

1. Survey questionnaires

The survey seeks demographic information concerning teachers' gender, specialisation and years of teaching experience, grade level, class size and school's postal code. These variables will be used to ascertain trends in the data. It is anticipated that the attached questionnaire should take approximately 15-20 minutes of teachers' time to complete. Early childhood teachers' participation in the study is greatly appreciated, as it is only teachers teaching in early childhood contexts who can provide accurate information. Please see enclosed copy of the early childhood teachers' survey questionnaire.

2. Group Interviews with early childhood teachers

The semi-structured group interviews will be undertaken during May – June, 2008, after obtaining permission from you for the study to proceed in your school, I will be undertake focus group interviews with interested teachers. It is anticipated that these group interviews, will comprise of six to eight participants, and will involve discussion of aspects in need of clarification and expansion, arising from findings of the questionnaires. Teachers who nominate to participate in this process will be asked to complete the consent form attached and post it back to me in the self-addressed envelope attached. In this way teachers' anonymity, when responding to the questionnaire can be maintained. The interview will be recorded on an audio voice recorder and is estimated to take approximately 1 – 1 ½ hours to complete.

Confidentiality and anonymity

Anonymity is guaranteed. The intention of the study is to examine teachers' perceptions of the professional and personal challenges associated with teaching in early childhood classrooms and no respondent or school will be identifiable in the resulting study report. Views expressed in the group interview by participants will remain confidential to the group. Confidentiality of participants' information cannot be guaranteed on behalf of other Focus Group members. The researcher will handle data, and information from the interviews will be downloaded onto a password protected computer. Raw data will then be transcribed into a Word document and will be stored in a locked filing cabinet in the Education Faculty at the University (Launceston Campus). At the end of the project, the data will be kept for a period of five years, after which time data files will be deleted and all raw data shredded and placed in a secure package for disposal.

Consent and withdrawal

Teachers' participation is entirely voluntary and they are free to decline to answer any questions if s/he so chooses. Consent for teachers' participation in the study will be evidenced by the return of the completed questionnaire and signed consent form, in the return paid envelope enclosed to the researcher. Please be aware that teachers' can withdraw from the study at any stage, at which time they can elect to withdraw any data supplied to that date.

Ethics approval

This study has received approval from the Department of Education, through the Office of Educational Review and the University Human Research Ethics Committee has given permission for the project to commence. If you have any concerns of an ethical nature or complaints about the manner in which the project is being conducted you may contact the Executive Officer (phone: 6226-7479; email: human.ethics@utas.edu.au).

Concerns or further information

If you have concerns regarding your teachers' involvement in this research, or you wish to gain further information regarding the project, please contact Helen Yost on 6324 3283 (or by email on Helen.Yost@utas.edu.au) or alternatively my university supervisor Dr Margot Boardman on 6324 3290 (or by email on Margot.Boardman@utas.edu.au), as we would be pleased to answer any queries pertaining to the study.

To allow the research study to proceed I would ask that you complete the enclosed consent form and return to the researcher in the self-addressed envelope provided. Upon receipt of your consent for the study to be undertaken in your school I will send information letters, consent forms and questionnaires, to you for distribution, to early childhood teachers seeking his/her participation in the study.

Sincere thanks for your anticipated support of this study.

Helen Yost
Postgraduate research student
Lecturer in Early Childhood Education

Dr Margot Boardman
Supervisor
Senior Lecturer in Early Childhood Education

Appendix C
Information Letter to EC Teachers

Letter to Teachers

Locked Bag 1308 Launceston

Tasmania, 7250 Australia

Telephone: (03) 63243144 Facsimile (03) 63243302



FACULTY OF EDUCATION

RESEARCH PROJECT:
Teaching today what's it really like?
Early childhood educators' professional and personal challenges

Dear

This research project has been designed to investigate early childhood teacher's perceptions of teaching. As you would be aware our profession is undergoing numerous changes and teachers are being challenged both professionally and personally. Many teachers find it difficult to maintain job satisfaction and as a result may experience stress and burnout, or leave the profession before they reach retirement age. These trends have serious repercussions on the status and future of the teaching profession. This research project aims to provide insights by gathering data from educators currently teaching in early childhood contexts. To enable me to gather relevant information for the study titled: ***Teaching today what's it really like? Early childhood educators' professional and personal, challenges***, in 2008 I will be undertaking questionnaire and group interviews as data gathering processes, *to investigate teachers' perceptions of teaching in early childhood classrooms, and the impact of 'change' (societal, economic, political and technological) on teacher's roles and responsibilities*. Your school principal has consented to your participation, thus I am seeking your approval to be part of this study and to participate in the research process.

Data Gathering Procedures:

1. Survey questionnaires

The questionnaire seeks demographic information concerning your gender, specialisation and years of teaching experience, grade level, class size and school's postal code. These variables will be used to ascertain trends in the data. It is anticipated that the attached questionnaire should take approximately 15-20 minutes of your time to complete. Your participation in the study is greatly appreciated, as it is only teachers, such as yourself who can provide accurate information. When complete please enclose and return your questionnaire in the stamped self-addressed envelope provided.

2. Group Interviews with early childhood teachers

The group interviews will be undertaken, in your area, during May – June, 2008. I would like to extend an invitation to interested teachers to participate in 'informal' focus group interviews. It is anticipated that the interviews, will comprise of six to eight participants, and will involve discussion of aspects in need of clarification and expansion, arising from findings of the questionnaires. Teachers nominating to participate in this process are asked to complete the consent form attached and post it back to me in the self-addressed envelope attached. In this way your anonymity, when responding to the questionnaire can be maintained. The interview will be recorded on an audio voice recorder and is estimated to take approximately 1 – 1 ½ hours to complete.

Confidentiality and anonymity

Anonymity is guaranteed. The intention of the study is to examine your perceptions of the professional and personal challenges associated with teaching in early childhood classrooms and no respondent or school will be identifiable in the resulting study report. Views expressed in the group interview by participants will remain confidential to the group. Confidentiality of participants' information cannot be guaranteed on behalf of other Focus Group members. The researcher will handle data, and information from the interviews will be downloaded onto a password protected computer. Raw data will then be transcribed into a Word document and will be stored in a locked filing cabinet in the Education Faculty at the University (Launceston Campus). At the end of the project, the data will be kept for a period of five years, after which time data files will be deleted and all raw data shredded and placed in a secure package for disposal.

Consent and withdrawal

Your participation is entirely voluntary and you are free to decline to answer any questions if you choose. Consent for your participation in the study will be evidenced by the return of the completed questionnaire and signed consent form, in the return paid envelope enclosed to the researcher. Please be aware that you can withdraw from the study at any stage, at which time you can elect to withdraw any data supplied to that date.

Ethics approval

This study has received approval from the Department of Education, through the Office of Educational Review and the University Human Research Ethics Committee has given permission for the project to commence. If you have any concerns of an ethical nature or complaints about the manner in which the project is being conducted you may contact the Executive Officer (phone: 6226-7479; email: human.ethics@utas.edu.au).

Concerns or further information

If you have concerns regarding your involvement in this research, or you wish to gain further information regarding the project, please contact Helen Yost on 6324 3283 (or by email on Helen.Yost@utas.edu.au) or alternatively my university supervisor Dr Margot Boardman on 6324 3290 (or by email on Margot.Boardman@utas.edu.au), as we would be pleased to answer any queries pertaining to the study. To allow the research study to proceed I would ask that you complete the enclosed questionnaire and consent form and return to the researcher. Your support in this research project is sincerely appreciated.

Helen Yost
Postgraduate research student
Lecturer in Early Childhood Education

Dr Margot Boardman
Supervisor
Senior Lecturer in Early Childhood Education

Appendix D

EC Teachers' Questionnaire



RESEARCH PROJECT:
Teaching today what's it really like?
Early childhood educators' professional and personal challenges

Globally education is being transformed; in Tasmania teachers are not immune to societal, economic, technological and political changes. In the past research projects have focussed on other sectors of education, thus there is limited data that is representative of early childhood teachers' perceptions. If early childhood teachers are to thrive, and provide optimal teaching and learning programs for children, then it is imperative that their views are obtained. This study seeks your perceptions of teaching in modern classrooms – what is it really like teaching in early childhood classrooms? As you are currently teaching in early childhood you are in an ideal context to provide insight, hence I would really appreciate you taking a few minutes of your time to answer the attached questionnaire



Teaching today what's it really like?

Early childhood educators' professional and personal challenges

SECTION 1: YOUR TEACHING BACKGROUND

Please indicate, by ticking the box, the response that best represents you and your teaching background.

1. Gender Male ☐ Female ☐

2. Please indicate your teaching specialisation ECE ☐ Primary ☐
Secondary ☐

Other please state

3. Including this year what is your total years of teaching experience?

Less than 7 years ☐ Between 8 – 15 years ☐ More than 16 years ☐

SECTION 2: MY CLASS THIS YEAR

I am interested in obtaining information about the grade level you are currently teaching and the number of students in your class this year. Please indicate, by ticking the box that best represents your situation.

4. This year's class size? Less than 15 students ☐ 16-20 students ☐
21-24 students ☐ More than 25 ☐
5. This year's grade level? Preparatory ☐ P/1 ☐
Grade 1 ☐ Grade 1/2 ☐

Other please state.....

As you would be aware the teaching profession is undergoing numerous changes and as a result, teachers are being challenged both professionally and personally. The following statements are designed to provide insights into the impact, of societal, economic, technological and political changes, on you as an educator of young children. Please circle the number that best represents your level of agreement to each of the statements provided below.

Section 3: My perceptions of the impact of change	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
6. Compared to teachers a decade ago, teachers today are required to teach students an increased and more diverse range of values, skills and understandings	1	2	3	4
7. Changes in family structures impact on teachers' workloads and responsibilities	1	2	3	4
8. In my school the learning provisions for children with specific and/or additional learning needs are comprehensive and highly effective	1	2	3	4
9. Some parents treat schools as a child-minding service	1	2	3	4
10. Technology has streamlined student reporting and assessment processes	1	2	3	4
11. The educational gains for ECE students using computers in the classroom are limited	1	2	3	4
12. Policy makers consult with teachers when making decisions about curriculum initiatives or change	1	2	3	4
13. In my school teachers have ample time to discuss pedagogical issues with colleagues	1	2	3	4

As mentioned above, change impacts on teachers, both professionally and personally. The following statements are designed to provide insights into the impact of change on you personally. Please circle the number that best represents your level of agreement to each of the statements provided below.

Section 4: Teaching in early childhood today	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
14. I have a wide and varied range of student abilities in my classroom	1	2	3	4
15. During the last two weeks I spent an average of 2 hours per day dealing with students who are easily distracted and/or disrupt peers	1	2	3	4
16. Society does not value nor appreciate the work that teachers do	1	2	3	4
17. My class size is conducive to teaching and student learning	1	2	3	4
18. Non-contact time is ample for my planning and resource preparations	1	2	3	4
19. I enjoy helping students to learn	1	2	3	4
20. In my school there are opportunities for my career advancement	1	2	3	4
21. My salary is sufficient for my workload	1	2	3	4
22. In my school teachers who have students with specific or high educational needs receive additional support	1	2	3	4

It has been reported that many teachers find it difficult to maintain job satisfaction and as a result often experience increased levels stress, or leave the profession before they reach retirement age. These trends have serious repercussions on the status and the future of the teaching profession. The following two (2) sections will provide insight into your perceptions of factors affecting your teaching role and responsibilities.

In the table below please select a number that best represents the amount of time you have spent on each of the tasks provided. For instance; number 1 represents a high or considerable proportion of your time, whereas 4 represent no time spent.

Section 5: Time on teaching related tasks	High	Medium	Low	None
23. Creation of teaching aids/resources	1	2	3	4
24. Planning	1	2	3	4
25. Parent meetings	1	2	3	4
26. Staff and/or grade meetings	1	2	3	4
27. Displays of student's work	1	2	3	4
28. Recording and compilation of student assessments	1	2	3	4

Section 6: Perceptions of job satisfaction

29. Since commencing teaching the highlights of my teaching have been...	30. Since commencing teaching the downsides of my teaching have been...

*Sincere thanks for taking the time to consider these important issues.
Your valuable contributions are appreciated.
Please return your response in the attached self-addressed, reply paid envelope
provided.*

Helen Yost
Helen.Yost@utas.edu.au

Appendix E

EC Teachers' Focus Group Interview Consent Form



RESEARCH PROJECT:

Teaching today what's it really like?
Early childhood educators' professional and personal challenges
Focus Group Interview Consent Form

I have read and understood the information letter provided.

I understand the interview process will involve a focus group interview comprised of approximately 6-8 interested early childhood teachers

I understand that the duration of the interview will be approximately 1 – 1½ hours.

I understand that no risks or discomfort are envisaged in the interview process.

I understand that the interview data will be treated as confidential.

I agree to participate in the focus group interview and understand that I can withdraw at any time without prejudice and may request personal data gathered be withdrawn from the study.

I agree that research data gathered for the study may be published provided that I cannot be identified as a participant.

Any questions I have had about the study have been answered satisfactorily.

I consent to participating in a focus group interview as part of the study.

Name:.....

Signature:.....

School Contact Details:

Phone.....Email:.....

Date:.....

Helen Yost & Dr Margot Boardman Faculty of Education, University of Tasmania
Locked Bag 1 307, Launceston, Tasmania 7250 Australia Facsimilie 036324 3048

Appendix F

Reminder Note for EC Teacher

A NOTE FROM HELEN



I hope you have had a most enjoyable holiday break and are feeling refreshed and ready for term three. Sincere thanks to everyone who has spent considerable time and effort on completing the questionnaire: *Teaching today what's it really like? Early childhood educators' professional and personal, challenges'*

Your thoughtful contributions are highly valued and I am feeling really excited about the diverse, yet powerful information received. If you haven't got around to completing your questionnaire as yet and wish your perspective to form part of the data collected, I would appreciate your response in the next week or so to enable me to commence the interview stage of the project.



Appendix G

Letter Acknowledging Principal's Contributions

Locked Bag 1308 Launceston

Tasmania, 7250 Australia



FACULTY OF EDUCATION

Private and Confidential

Dear [insert principal's name]

Thank you for distributing the questionnaires to early childhood teachers at
[insert name of school] Primary School.

[Insert principal's name] would you please distribute the enclosed notes
from me to thank these teachers for the time and effort spent on completing
the questionnaire, *Teaching today what's it really like? Early childhood educators'
professional and personal, challenges'*

I have valued the thoughtful contributions, and I am feeling really excited
about the diverse yet powerful information I have received. I am still keen to
receive questionnaires from those teachers who would like to inform the data
collection and I would appreciate your response in the next week or so to
enable me to commence the next stage of the project.

Many thanks in advance of your continued support

Helen Yost

University of Tasmania

Appendix H

Email to Focus Group Interviewees

EMAIL SENT TO CONSENTING FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEWEES

Dear Early Childhood teachers

You may remember recently you very generously consented to participate in a focus group interview, as part of my research project *Teaching today what's it really like?*

Early childhood educators' professional and personal, challenges'

I have now completed the initial analysis of questionnaire data and I would really appreciate your contribution and attendance in a focus group interview. I would like to invite you to an afternoon tea to share your thoughts with others, and me, in a friendly relaxed forum.

Please see the attached invitation outlining the details, time and venue.

I look forward to meeting you next week

Kind regards

Helen Yost

Appendix I

One Example of an Invitation to Attend Focus Group Interview



You're invited to afternoon tea



Sincere thanks for consenting to participate in a focus group interview.

Your attendance and participation in the focus group interview will contribute to and inform the research project: *Teaching today what's it really like? Early childhood educators' professional and personal, challenges'*

WHEN: Wednesday 27th August, 2008

OR

Thursday 28th August 2008

TIME: 3.45PM-4.45PM

WHERE: ROOM 302

HYTTEN HALL

FACULTY OF EDUCATION (see attached map)

HOBART CAMPUS

RSVP: TUESDAY 26TH August, 2008

Helen.Yost@utas.edu.au

Thank you in advance for your support.

PS: If you are unable to attend either of these times please email or telephone me (6324 3283-work or 0408 431912 - mobile) to arrange an alternative time.

Appendix J

Focus Group Interview Schedule

FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

RESEARCH PROJECT:

Teaching today what's it really like?

Early childhood educators' professional and personal challenges

Self introductions and reminder about group confidentiality

Question 1 Theme: Reasons for Becoming a Classroom Teacher

1a Can you share with the group your reasons for becoming an EC teacher?

1b What are the benefits for you personally of being an EC teacher?

Question 2 Theme: Teaching in EC Classrooms

2a What aspects of your role as an EC educator have changed since you commenced teaching?

2b What aspects of your role as an EC educator have stayed the same since you commenced teaching?

Question 3 Theme: Change Aspirations for the Role of an EC Teacher

3a If you could change one aspect of your work what would you change?

Question 4 Theme: Impact of Change Upon Teachers and Their Teaching

4a So what are the impacts of change upon you and your teaching?

4b Describe a challenge you face recently in your teaching how did you plan to resolve the issue/incident?

4c I am interested in hearing your perceptions about why teachers remain in the face of challenges/changes in their roles?

Question 5 Theme: Teachers' Perceptions of Working a 35-Hour Week

5a I am interested in hearing your perceptions in relation to the statement that teachers 'work' for 35 hours per week.

5b Who places these expectations on teachers?

Question 6 Theme: Further Comments

6a Would you like to make any further comments in relation to your work as an educator of young children?

Thank you for your willingness and participation in completing this interview.

Appendix K
Summary of Findings for EC Teachers

FINDINGS: The findings arising from this study included:

- As highly experienced practitioners the majority of participants reported feeling challenged by teaching in contemporary early childhood classrooms.
- Unrelenting curriculum changes had a significant impact upon the personal and professional lives of early childhood teachers.
- The enjoyment of teaching young students was reported by the majority of participants as being a highlight which sustained their teaching practice.
- Generally teachers perceived with adequate resourcing, the integration of students with special needs into mainstream classrooms was a positive experience for those involved.
- Early childhood teachers reported their concerns associated with managing students with dysfunctional behaviours.
- Time related issues were reported by all teachers, with some participants reporting spending substantial

amounts of time after hours on essential teaching-related tasks.

For more information about this study's findings, please contact

Helen Yost.

Phone: (03) 6324 3283

Email: Helen.Yost@utas.edu.au

RESEARCH PROJECT:

***Teaching today what's it really like?
Early childhood educators' personal
and professional challenges***

*The main purpose of this study was to
investigate Kindergarten – Grade 2
teachers' perceptions of teaching in
Tasmanian Department of Education
classrooms.*

Helen Yost
University of Tasmania

Study Population
North (n= 12)

Esk (12)

North-West
(n= 19)

Arthur (6)

Jarrington(13)

South
(n=34)

Bowen (12)

Derwent(17)

Hartz (5)

Gender:

Female 63

Male 2

Teaching Specialisations:

ECE

75.4% (49)

Primary

13.8% (9)

Other

9.2% (6)

Years of Teaching Experience

>16 years

67.7% (44)

8-15 years

20% (13)

<7 years

12.3% (8)

- **Highlights of ECE Teaching**
- **Contributions to student learning** i.e. influencing learning; seeing student achievements.
- **Developing positive relationships with others** i.e. parents, colleagues & students.
- **Job satisfaction and success** i.e. enjoyment of working with ECE students; receiving appreciation/recognition; participating in collaborative planning, professional learning.
- **Challenges/Issues of ECE Teaching**
- **Teacher related** i.e. increased planning/accountability/workload; curriculum & pedagogical change; lack of time; increased class sizes; inadequate resources/equipment/facilities.
- **Student related** i.e. inclusion of students with special needs; increased behavioural issues; student diversity.

➤ Teachers were predominantly experienced teachers with 87.7% (n=57) having >8 years of teaching experience.

Societal change

- 98.4% of teachers agreed changes in family structures impact upon teachers' workloads & responsibilities.
- Teachers reported lack of student school readiness, increased non-teaching related roles.
- 84.7% of teachers agreed some parents treat schools as a child-minding service. Teachers reported some students were disadvantaged and working with parents who were unreasonable or difficult was challenging.
- 79.4% of teachers agreed society does not value nor appreciate the work that teachers do. Teachers reported changing attitudes impact upon teachers and their work.
- Teachers reported lack of professional recognition; increased stress and related issues; changing attitudes towards teachers and school by society, media, DoE, resourcing and related issues have altered over time.

Inclusion

- 98.4% of teachers agreed that today they were required to teach students an increased and more diverse range of values and life skills, which was exacerbated by the integration of students into mainstream classrooms.
- 82.8% of teachers agreed that teachers who have students with specific and high educational needs receive additional support. Teachers reported they still required more resources and regular access to other specialists (speech therapists, social workers and occupational therapists).

Curriculum reforms

- 87.5% of teachers agreed that consultation by policy makers with teachers, when making decisions about curriculum initiatives or changes, was lacking hence teachers chose to implement curriculum reform processes in a selective manner.

Inadequate time

- 76.9% of teachers agreed that non-contact time was not regularly provided, nor long enough in duration, requiring many teachers to work outside the hours stipulated by DoE.

I would like to acknowledge the support provided by participating principals enabling the study to be undertaken in their schools. I would also like to sincerely thank the early childhood teachers who willingly participated in this study.

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THANK YOU