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TASMANIA

**Understanding family use
of a universal early childhood education program
in Tasmanian communities experiencing disadvantage**

by

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Declaration of originality

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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 Committee of the University.

This project has been approved by the Tasmanian Health and Medical Research Ethics Committee (H0016203) and the Social Sciences Human Research Ethics Committee (H0016195).

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Abstract

Access to high quality early childhood education appears to be particularly important for children from low SES backgrounds who receive proportionately greater benefits than children from less disadvantaged backgrounds. Launching into Learning (LiL) is a Tasmanian Department of Education program that provides universal school-based education services to support families and young children aged 0-5 years. At LiL sessions, children and their parents/carers engage in a range of indoor and outdoor play-based learning activities under the guidance of an early childhood educator. The research presented in this thesis explores how Tasmanian parents living in two communities experiencing disadvantage use and experience LiL and the factors shaping their use and experiences. In addition, policy and other documents related to LiL are analysed to identify the intended purpose of LiL and how LiL users are framed and positioned.

Research was conducted between April 2017 and December 2018. Participants were 39 parents/carers ('families'), 32 early childhood education professionals. Over 100 naturalistic observations were collected during an extensive period of fieldwork at LiL sites and a range of other early childhood settings.

Policy documents relevant to LiL were analysed using Bacchi's (2009) 'What is the Problem Represented to Be' approach. Parent information brochures were analysed using thematic analysis. Parents' use and experiences of LiL were investigated using participant observation (PO) of LiL sessions, and interviews with parents and early childhood educators. Between 2017-2019, 39 parents with one or more children aged under five years, and 20 educators (teachers and aides) were recruited into the study from two Tasmanian communities. PO and interview data underwent a thematic analysis that included theoretically informed coding derived from Bourdieusian concepts including cultural and social capital.

The analysis of policy documents found that the intended purpose of LiL is to create school readiness, ease transitions of children and their parents into schooling, and to support improved learning outcomes amongst Tasmania's children. Parents who were viewed as 'less engaged' in schooling or LiL were often problematised in policy documents. Analysis of interview and PO data found that key factors shaping parents' use of LiL are social and geographic isolation, family life complexity, and aspects of services that helped them to feel

either at ease, or as ‘fish out of water’. Parents who made less use of LiL often described multiple barriers to engagement. Parents and early childhood teachers generally shared similar understandings of LiL. Both saw LiL as supporting school readiness, transition into schooling, and early social and academic skills. Differences in how teachers and parents viewed appropriate engagement with LiL sometimes created tensions between them. Bourdieu’s concepts of social and cultural capitals were useful in understanding how parents use and experience LiL. Participating in LiL helped parents who were socially isolated by expanding their social capital. It also provided opportunities for diversification of family level cultural capital. Engagement with LiL was more likely to be precarious amongst families whose cultural capital resources were likely to be of less socially dominant forms. The influence of social class was strongly evident. Parents who used LiL reported a range of benefits to them and their children. Transitions into schooling were eased, with LiL building familiarity with the school setting, routines and expectations.

This thesis also highlights a paradoxical relationship that exists between schools and families living with disadvantage. Families residing in low SES communities are less likely to belong to dominant social class groups, and therefore tend to possess differing levels of capitals from those who occupy the middle and upper classes. It was evident in this study that the benefits of LiL were also accompanied by some drawbacks. Families using services such as LiL can experience a delegitimisation of their capitals, and symbolic violence. In this study, some parents were observed to respond to this with a passive resistance to LiL messaging, non-engagement, or withdrawal from the program. This study points to the need to further address the lived realities of symbolic violence in early childhood education, which can occur in the process of enacting the well-intentioned goal of building school readiness.

Programs such as LiL are still novel and little is known about how they are being experienced and used by parents. This thesis provides valuable information to support service providers and policy makers in the design of early childhood education services. In addition, the findings make an empirical and theoretical contribution to the sociology of education that help explain why families living in lower SES communities may be less likely to engage with early childhood education programs than families from more affluent areas and how parents and children appear to benefit from participating in LiL.

Contents

DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY.....	I
AUTHORITY OF ACCESS.....	II
STATEMENT OF ETHICAL CONDUCT	III
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	IV
ABSTRACT	VI
CONTENTS.....	VIII
INDEX OF TABLES.....	XIV
INDEX OF FIGURES.....	XIV
THESIS STRUCTURE.....	XV
VISUAL REPRESENTATION OF THESIS STRUCTURE	XVII
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION	1
1.1. Research aims and questions	2
1.2. Study overview and key terminology	4
1.3. Universal early childhood education services in Tasmania	5
1.3.1. LiL	5
1.3.2. Kindergarten.....	5
1.3.3. CFCs	6
1.4. Early childhood education in Tasmania	6
1.5. Socioeconomic status/social class in this thesis	7
1.6. Chapter conclusion	9
CHAPTER 2: GOVERNMENT PROVISION OF SERVICES, AND UNDERSTANDINGS OF BEGINNING SCHOOL.....	10
2.1. The welfare state	10
2.2. Overview of the historical background of ECEC services	14

2.3. Changing understandings of child development: The importance of the early years.....	24
2.4. Beginning school and school readiness	26
2.5. Chapter conclusion	33
CHAPTER 3: THEORETICAL BACKGROUND: BOURDIEU AND THIS STUDY.....	35
3.1. Introduction.....	35
3.2. Pierre Bourdieu.....	36
3.3. Central concepts	37
3.4. Habitus	38
3.5. Capitals	40
3.6. Economic capital	41
3.7. Cultural capital.....	42
3.8. Social capital	44
3.9. Field	45
3.10. Symbolic violence	45
3.11. Foucault and Bourdieu	47
3.12. Critiques of Bourdieu	48
3.13. Contemporary application of Bourdieu in education.....	50
3.14. Chapter conclusion.....	53
CHAPTER 4: METHODOLOGY AND METHODS.....	55
4.1. Introduction.....	55
4.2. Epistemology and ontology.....	56
4.3. Phase one: Document analysis.....	58
4.4. Document analysis methods	59
4.5. Parent information brochures.....	61
4.6. Phase two: Field work study	62
4.6.1. Ethnography	62
4.7. Background to the research in this study: River Town and Distant Hills	66
4.8. Early childhood services in Tasmania	69

4.9. Gaining access and participant recruitment	70
4.10. Participants: Families	71
4.11. Participants: Service providers	73
4.12. Participant observation	73
4.13. Fieldnotes	75
4.14. Semi-structured interviews	77
4.15. Participant data management and analysis	78
4.16. Interview coding and analysis process	78
4.17. Vignettes	86
4.18. Reflexivity	86
4.19. Limitations of qualitative methodologies	87
4.20. Limitations of social construction	89
4.21. Ethics	91
4.22. Chapter conclusion	93
CHAPTER 5: DOCUMENT ANALYSIS	94
5.1. Introduction	94
5.2. Part One, Policy Document Analysis	94
5.3. Analysis of policy documents	95
5.3.1. Belonging, Being and Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia (ELYF)	95
5.4. Summary of the ELYF analysis	102
5.5. Analysis of the Guide to Reading and Using Tasmania's Strategy for Children- Pregnancy to Eight Years 2018-2021	102
5.6. Analysis of Tasmania's Strategy for Children - Pregnancy to Eight Years 2018-2021 (the Strategy)	104
5.7. Summary of Tasmania's Strategy for Children analysis	107
5.8. Part Two, Parent Brochure Analysis	109
5.8.1. Thematic analysis of parent information brochures	109
5.9. Parent's responsibilities	114
5.10. Children's futures	115
5.11. Service information	116

5.12. Document analysis discussion	118
5.13. Chapter conclusion.....	121
 CHAPTER 6: ETHNOGRAPHIC RESULTS	 123
6.1. Setting the scene, a morning at LiL.....	123
6.2. Theme One: Isolation	126
6.2.1. Vignette: Tegan	126
6.2.2. Transport disadvantage.....	129
6.2.3. Walking.....	131
6.2.4. Isolation as a single parent.....	134
6.2.5. Getting out of the house, overcoming social isolation.....	135
6.2.6. Social capital	136
6.2.7. Economic capital	140
6.2.8. Cultural capital	141
6.3. Theme Two: Complex Lives	143
6.3.1. Vignette: Stacey	143
6.3.2. Complex lives.....	146
6.3.3. Focus on immediate concerns.....	147
6.3.4. Social anxiety.....	148
6.3.5. Barriers to connection.....	151
6.3.6. Complexity and long-term engagement.....	152
6.3.7. Economic capital	153
6.3.8. Social capital and complex lives	155
6.3.9. Cultural capital and complex lives	155
6.4. Theme Three: Features of Services.....	156
6.4.1. Vignette: Bethany.....	156
6.4.2. Relationships	158
6.4.3. Relationships with teachers/service providers	159
6.4.4. Preparation for Kindergarten	160
6.4.5. A place for parents	162
6.4.6. Economic capital	164
6.4.7. Social capital.....	166
6.4.8. Cultural capital	168
6.5. Chapter conclusion	168
 CHAPTER 7: DISCUSSION	 170
7.1. Question One: How does the Tasmanian Government describe and position LiL and Kindergarten? What are the problems that these services seek to address?	171
7.2. Question Two: How are families using LiL?	175
7.2.1. Where, how, and why?	176
7.3. Question Three: What are the key factors that shape families' use of, and engagement with LiL?	180
7.4. Isolation	181

7.4.1. Transport disadvantage.....	181
7.4.2. Geographic isolation	182
7.4.3. Social isolation.....	182
7.5. Complex lives	183
7.6. Features of services	186
7.7. Question Four: How do families and service providers explain the purposes of LiL and do they share the same understandings?	188
7.7.1. Resistance and symbolic violence.	189
7.8. Habitus and capitals.....	191
7.9. Strengths and limitations	194
CHAPTER 8: THESIS CONCLUSION	198
APPENDIX 1: FAMILY PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET	202
APPENDIX 2: FAMILY PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM	205
APPENDIX 3: SERVICE PROVIDER INFORMATION SHEET	207
APPENDIX 4: SERVICE PROVIDER CONSENT FORM	210
APPENDIX 5: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE, FAMILIES, INTERVIEW ONE	212
APPENDIX 6: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE, FAMILIES, INTERVIEW TWO	214
APPENDIX 7: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE, SERVICE PROVIDERS	215
APPENDIX 8: SITE RESEARCH POSTER.....	216
APPENDIX 9: PARENT INFORMATION BROCHURE, CHILD AND FAMILY CENTRES (ARTEFACT 1)	217
APPENDIX 10: PARENT INFORMATION BROCHURE, STARTING KINDERGARTEN (ARTEFACT 2)	218
APPENDIX 11: PARENT INFORMATION BROCHURE, GET INVOLVED IN YOUR CHILD’S EDUCATION (ARTEFACT 3)	219
APPENDIX 12: PARENT INFORMATION BROCHURE, READY TO START SCHOOL CHECKLIST (ARTEFACT 4)	220

APPENDIX 13: PARENT INFORMATION BROCHURE, AT WHAT AGE DOES MY CHILD START/LEAVE SCHOOL? (ARTEFACT 5)	221
APPENDIX 14: PARENT INFORMATION BROCHURE, LAUNCHING INTO LEARNING (ARTEFACT 6)	222
APPENDIX 15: PARENT INFORMATION BROCHURE, KINDER READY (ARTEFACT 7)	223
REFERENCES.....	224

Index of tables

Table 1: Early Childhood Education and Care arrangements in Australia	23
Table 2: Number of Children (and Families) Using Childcare by Service Type, Tasmania and National, March Quarter (DET, 2020).....	24
Table 3: Research Site Demographic Information	68
Table 4: Parent’s Roles and Responsibilities.....	111
Table 5: Children’s Futures	112
Table 6: Service Information	113

Index of figures

Figure 1: Timeline of development of ECEC in Australia	22
Figure 2: Family Participant Educational Attainment	73
Figure 3: NVivo coding tree with parent node for ‘Parenting’, and ‘Parenting’ child nodes.....	83
Figure 4: Example of NVivo memos in analysis for concept of ‘Relationships’	83
Figure 5: Overview of themes.....	111

Thesis structure

The structure of this thesis is as follows:

Chapter One provides an overview of this thesis and presents the research questions and aims.

Chapter Two sets the background for this study and addresses historical factors that relate to this research, as well as the emergence of early childhood education and care, and the socio-political contexts in which it has developed. The welfare state is outlined to provide further context and explain the socio-political background from which programs and social interventions have emerged. The concept of school readiness is also presented. School readiness is used to explain early differences in children's transitions and academic development.

Chapter Three presents the work of Pierre Bourdieu and explains how his concepts provide the theoretical underpinnings for the major part of this study. His concepts of habitus, capitals, field and symbolic violence are outlined, as well as critiques of his work. Some examples of how Bourdieu's concepts have been applied in sociological investigations of education are then presented.

Ethnographic approaches of participant observation, formal and informal interviews and fieldnotes are outlined and the research sites and research participants are detailed. The secondary research method of document analysis is explained. This is followed by a discussion of the research sites and participants.

Chapter Four gives a detailed account of the qualitative methods and methodology used throughout this investigation. This includes explanations of the epistemological and ontological standpoints of this research, the use of ethnography, vignettes, and document analysis, as well as limitations of the approaches used. The chapter also provides a description of the research sites and participants, ethics, and data analysis techniques.

Chapter Five presents the document analysis. The analysis of two key policy documents that inform early childhood education in Tasmania is detailed. This is accompanied by the analysis of DoE parent information brochures. The findings of these analyses are detailed and used to understand key ideas and messaging that shape LiL and the way it is delivered.

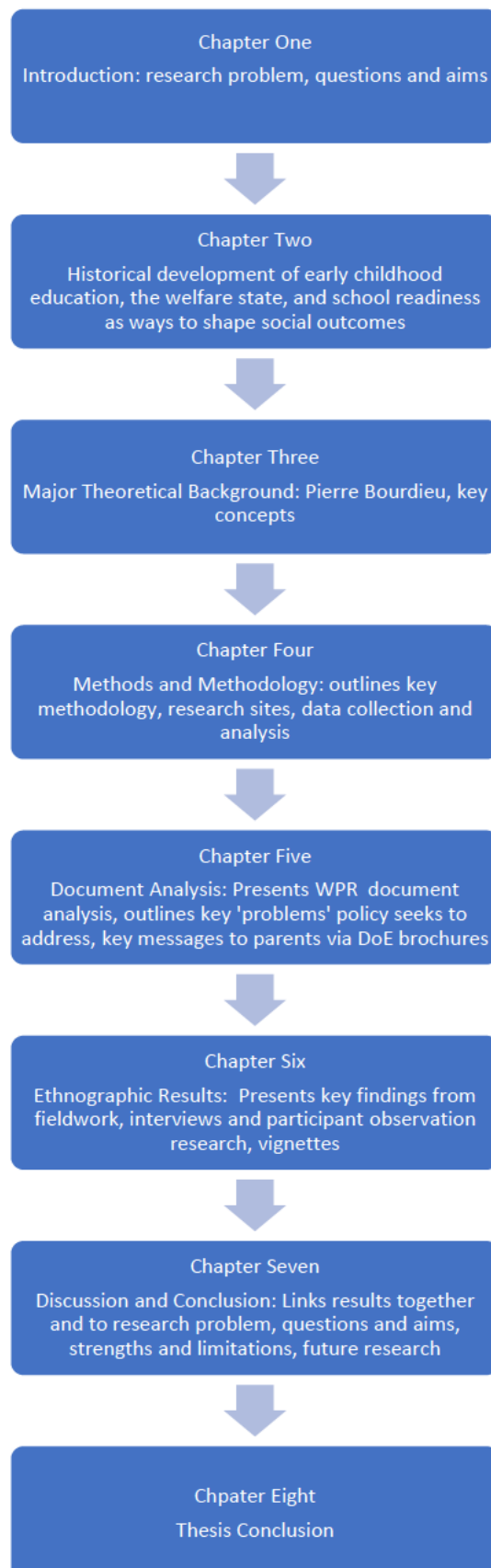
Chapter Six presents findings from the ethnographically informed, and larger part of this study using four vignettes. The first vignette describes the 'look and feel' of a LiL classroom. Subsequent vignettes explain the key themes identified using excerpts from interviews and fieldnotes.

A discussion of the overarching findings of this research is presented in Chapter Seven. This is structured according to the research questions and is then related to the theoretical approaches of Bourdieu which guide this study. The strengths and limitations of this work are also addressed. Finally, implications for early childhood education policy, service design, and future research are presented.

Chapter Eight concludes this thesis.

A visual representation of this thesis structure is presented on the following page.

Visual representation of thesis structure



Chapter 1: Introduction

This thesis explores how parents use and experience Launching into Learning (LiL), a universal early childhood education service in Tasmania, Australia. LiL is a Tasmanian Department of Education program that provides free, school based universal education services to support families and young children aged 0-5 years. LiL is facilitated by qualified early childhood teachers and is available in all Tasmanian Government primary and district schools. Unique in Australia, LiL was developed by the Tasmanian Government in response to evidence that Tasmanian children are at increased risk of poor developmental, health, educational and social outcomes due at least in part to factors associated with the experience of socioeconomic disadvantage.

The positive effects of high-quality early childhood education is well recognised (Gomez, 2016). However, access to quality early childhood education appears to be particularly important for children from low socioeconomic status (SES) backgrounds who receive proportionately greater benefits than children from backgrounds characterised by more socioeconomic advantage (Petitclerc et al., 2017; Speight et al., 2010). Consequently, there is an increasing focus on implementing educational interventions at the very earliest stages of children's educational/learning processes to promote developmentally optimal early childhood experiences that support them in reaching their highest potential. These programs aim to reduce education and health disparities over the life course, and to provide benefits to children and society more broadly.

In Australia, programs such as LiL are still novel and little is known about how they are being experienced and used by parents. This study focuses on the Tasmanian LiL program and seeks to better understand the perceived social problems that the program was designed to address, how early childhood education and LiL are understood and represented in policy and parent information documents, and most importantly for this study, parents' use and experiences of LiL (and to a lesser extent Kindergarten) in Tasmanian Communities experiencing socioeconomic disadvantage.

1.1. Research aims and questions

The research presented in this thesis has three aims:

1. To investigate how LiL is framed and positioned in government policy documents and the accounts of service providers.
2. Explore how parents from two communities experiencing socioeconomic disadvantage experience, use, and engage with LiL.
3. To sociologically analyse parent and service provider perspectives, and government policy documents about LiL.

To support the research aims, the following questions guide the research:

1. How does the Tasmanian Government describe and position LiL, and what are the problems that this service seeks to address?
2. How are families using LiL?
3. What are the key factors that shape families' use of and engagement with LiL?
4. How do families and service providers understand the purposes of LiL, and do they share the same understandings?

This research was conducted between 2016-2020 within a study funded by a National Health and Medical Research Council Partnership Project grant (APP1115891), Pathways to Better Health and Education Outcomes for Tasmania's Children (known as the Tassie Kids study). The Tassie Kids Study was a partnership project established between the University of Tasmania, the Menzies Institute for Medical Research, the Telethon Kids Institute, the University of Western Australia and Tasmanian Departments of Health and Human Services, Education and Premier and Cabinet to examine families' use and experiences of government universal early childhood services. The thesis contributes new knowledge about LiL to support government policy and service planning to improve service uptake and better support children's early development.

In addition to providing valuable information to support service providers and policy makers, this thesis also aims to make an empirical and theoretical contribution to the sociology of education by gathering new data about how parents who are living in

communities living with high levels of socioeconomic disadvantage engage with early childhood education and their experiences of participating in a program such as LiL.

To achieve this, I have applied two distinct sociological frameworks to the data gathered. The first is the What's the Problem Represented to Be (WPR) approach for analysing policy documents developed by Carol Bacchi (2009). Stemming from Foucault's poststructural analyses of governance, WPR examines policy documents by posing six guiding questions that aim to uncover the social problems or issues that policies seek to address. In doing so, it becomes possible to consider the ways that particular 'problems' are conceptualised, and how this shapes the focus and approach of initiatives such as LiL. This policy document analysis is accompanied by a thematic analysis of Tasmanian Department of Education (DoE) parent information brochures that are designed to inform parents of young children about Tasmanian Government early childhood programs.

The second sociological framework applied in this thesis is that of Pierre Bourdieu. This theoretical perspective is more significant in terms of its application to the overall thesis. Bourdieu's concepts provide a valuable set of 'tools' with which to examine how educational systems can be experienced differently between actors from different social groups, the unexpected consequences of education, and the complexities surrounding education and the reproduction of social inequality. Bourdieu and the many researchers since who have used his work have focussed heavily on secondary and tertiary education. Bourdieusian informed early childhood education research is less common. This thesis makes a contribution towards building this literature.

While this study aims to contribute to ongoing improvements in early childhood services and policy, the focus of this thesis is parents, rather than children. The reasons for this are threefold. Firstly, whilst it is an early childhood program, LiL has a significant focus on parents and the role of parents in children's early learning and development. Therefore, the ways that parents experience LiL is important in understanding how they engage with it. Secondly, reflecting the multidisciplinary inputs into contemporary early learning literature, the importance of parents and parental engagement in children's early development is well established (Gross et al. 2020: 747). However, parents are often problematised and disempowered in regard to the perceived issues associated with children from low SES backgrounds. This thesis seeks to intentionally recognise and promote the agency of parents

by respecting the skills, experiences and expertise of each participant. This study seeks to make a sociological contribution to the field, and to understand what it is about services such as LiL that parents value, or are dissuaded by, thereby positioning parents' views as central. Additionally, as parents are the means by which children can access early childhood education, understanding their experiences offers opportunities to improve chances for children to attain the benefits of early childhood education. In adopting this approach, this thesis aims to privilege the voices of parents living in communities affected by socioeconomic disadvantage.

1.2. Study overview and key terminology

This investigation was conducted in Tasmania, Australia's island state with an area of 68,401 km² and a population of 509,965 people in 2016 (ABS, 2016; Geoscience Australia 2020). The research primarily took place within two Tasmanian communities experiencing socioeconomic disadvantage: one community in the North of the state (pseudonym River Town), and the other in the South (pseudonym Distant Hills). The sites and research participants are detailed in Chapter Four.

The main universal early childhood education services in Tasmania are LiL, Kindergarten, and Child and Family Centres (CFCs). Most of the study data was collected at these Tasmanian DoE services.

The term early childhood education and care (ECEC) is used in this thesis, and the early childhood field more broadly. In Australia, use of the term is connected to OECD Country Reports, and Starting Strong reports (see for example *OECD Thematic Review of Early Childhood Education and care Policy* (OECD 2000)). ECEC is understood as to encompass "children from birth to compulsory school age and includes the transition period into primary schooling" (OECD, 2001: 4). It refers to the broad range of programs and initiatives that are designed to promote the development of young children from birth, across social, emotional, physical, and cognitive domains, as a way to support lifelong development and wellbeing. The term encapsulates that contemporary approaches to early childhood services developed out of a two-pronged history, where services either focussed on care and nurturing of children (childcare), or their learning and education (early childhood

education), but not both. As a result of changed parental and government expectations however, the two have become increasingly intertwined, both at a service and policy level.

1.3. Universal early childhood education services in Tasmania

1.3.1. LiL

LiL is a pre-cursor to Kindergarten and provides playgroup-style sessions that cater for children from birth up to four years. Facilitated by teachers, LiL aims to support children's learning, and the development of school readiness to reduce the need for "catch up" after a child has commenced school (DoE, 2017b). LiL is offered in all Tasmanian Government primary and district schools, and some CFCs (see below). LiL is promoted as "a free program where you and your child can get to know your local school, Child and Family Centre and other families" (DoE, 2019). LiL teachers emphasise the role of parents in their children's learning, and parents are expected to attend and engage with children whilst they use LiL services (DoE, 2019c). Whilst Kindergarten is well utilised, the Tasmanian Government reports low uptake of LiL in communities experiencing the most socioeconomic disadvantage. Children attend LiL sessions with their parents/carers and engage in a range of indoor and outdoor play-based learning activities that are designed to support child development, encourage parents/carers to engage in developmentally supportive activities with their children, promote school readiness, and ease transitions into schooling. The number and range of sessions available in each area varies, with some schools offering excursions and off-site activities in addition to regular weekly school-based programs.

1.3.2. Kindergarten

In Tasmania, Kindergartens are part of primary schools and are taught by university qualified teachers. Kindergarten is available to children who turn four years of age on January 1 of the school year. Children attend Kindergarten without their parents/carers for 15 hours a week for either half days, or full days (DoE, 2017a). At Kindergarten children engage in a range of play-based learning activities to develop literacy and numeracy skills. For most children, Kindergarten is the start of formal schooling. The terms 'preschool' and 'Kindergarten' are often used interchangeably across different Australian states and territories. In Tasmania however, they are generally seen as different activities. While it is not compulsory, Kindergarten is the first year of schooling for most Tasmanian children, and pre-school represents the school activities that children may undertake in the year/s prior to

Kindergarten (Cheeseman and Torr, 2009). In other jurisdictions ‘preschool’ can refer to a range of services for children in the years before they commence full time, compulsory schooling. These are not always government run or located in schools. Some services are offered at no cost to families, others are not. In Tasmania, ‘preschools’ are referred to as Kindergartens. They cater for children who turn four on or prior to January 1 in the year before they start Kindergarten. Kindergartens are offered by both public and privately funded schools, with the majority being owned and run by the Tasmanian Department of Education and located within Primary schools. Taught by registered teachers, Kindergarten sessions are either half or full days, and children attend for 15 hours each week during school terms (DoE, 2017a).

1.3.3. CFCs

Tasmanian Child and Family Centres (CFCs) are a whole-of-government initiative of the Tasmanian Government which commenced in 2009. Tasmania’s 12 CFCs are welcoming, flexible, place-based centres that provide services for communities with “high service needs” (Taylor et al., 2017: 8). CFCs provide a single-entry point for families to a suite of services and supports from a range of disciplinary and professional backgrounds to better meet the needs of families and support the education and wellbeing of young children (Taylor et al., 2017: 8). Centres offer universal, progressive universal, targeted, and specialist programs and services from pregnancy to five years of age (Taylor et al., 2017: 12). There are currently 12 CFCs across Tasmania. A broad range of education and support services for families are offered at CFCs to simplify families’ access through a single-entry point. Children attend CFCs with their parents/carers.

Whilst this thesis focusses primarily on LiL and the experiences of families in relation to LiL, participants were accessed through Kindergarten and CFCs as well as LiL sites. This meant that I could capture the views of a broader range of service users.

1.4. Early childhood education in Tasmania

Early years programs in Tasmania are guided by Tasmania’s Strategy for Children - Pregnancy to Eight Years 2018-2021 (*the Strategy*) (DoE, 2017c). Underpinned by the United Nations Convention on the rights of The Child, *the Strategy* sets a broad, aspirational agenda for children that is shaped by families, communities, environments, and service providers.

Developed in consultation with early years stakeholders including families, *the Strategy* outlines goals, approaches, and outcome measures. Also informing Tasmania's early childhood programs is *Belonging, Being and Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia* (EYLF) (DET, 2009). Developed by the Australian Government, the EYLF is the national early childhood learning policy document that aims to ensure children in all early years services are able to access high quality learning, delivered by qualified staff. The EYLF guides program design and delivery in a range of early childhood service settings that include day care, preschools, and family day care. The ELYF aims to support children in accessing play-based learning 'that is engaging and builds success for life' (DEEWR, 2019). These key documents will be examined in Chapter Five, as they provide important insight into how early years education is understood and used to shape children's development and outcomes.

1.5. Socioeconomic status/social class in this thesis

This thesis uses the lens of class and social status to consider the experiences of parents and families using services. There are two primary reasons for this. Firstly, the broader study in which my research took place (Tassie Kids) sought to understand how people living in communities affected by disadvantage use early childhood services. Other factors such as gender or ethnicity were broadly out of scope for this study. Secondly, this research took place in small Tasmanian communities. I felt that there was a risk to participant's anonymity and privacy posed by differentiating their comments and insights by gender or ethnicity or other intersections of experience.

Throughout this thesis I refer to socioeconomic disadvantage, class, and class-based inequities. The terms *class*, *socioeconomic positioning*, *wealth* and *poverty* are used to refer to social categories that are broadly understood within sociology as social class: A very broad definition of a social class is a "large scale grouping of people who share common economic resources, which strongly influence the type of lifestyles they are able to lead" (Giddens and Sutton, 2017: 484). However, a more refined definition of class is difficult to attain, with exceptions to every rule. As observed by Connell and Irving (1980: 11) "One can define a process of class formation with considerable rigour; but never it would seem, 'class' itself". Despite multiple and conflicting debates about how best to define class, one feature, however, is certain:

Classes are real groups of flesh-and-blood people, formed under particular stars at particular times and places, who work out their fate together- and whose fate is what politics is all about (Connell and Irving, 1980: 7).

Throughout this thesis I use the terms *working class* and (people experiencing) *disadvantage* to refer to children, groups of families, and families in this study who are living in communities characterised by low income. There are many ways to consider these terms, and there is disagreement amongst social scientists about a definitive approach to measuring them (Lareau, 2011). In this thesis *working or lower class* families are those who live in households where no adult/parent is employed in a role with managerial responsibility or that requires high level educational qualifications. One parent or adult may be employed in a role with no managerial responsibility (Lareau, 2011: 365). Being of *working/lower class* or *poor* (where no parent is in paid employment) is closely associated with the experience of socioeconomic disadvantage. Working class or lower class families might not be participating in paid work, or they may have one or two adult members working in employment that receives low remuneration. I refer to *middle class* and *upper class families* as two broad social groups who occupy the more socially powerful, or 'elite' positions, in comparison to those of lower class status. Such families are more likely to be headed by parents of whom one or both are employed in middle to higher income brackets. They are more likely to be university educated and work in middle to upper level professional roles. I do this acknowledging that class is all of the above, but that it is not only, or always, those factors. There are innumerable possibilities and variations of people and their lived experiences in any given social grouping. There are however commonalities that shape those possibilities and various lived experiences. In Australia, as in many similar Westernised nations, class is not a distinct separation of groups and is difficult to delineate. Bourdieu's approach to class was influenced by a form of Althusserian Marxism. Like Marx, Bourdieu recognises that modern capitalism is imbued with class inequality. Moreover, reflecting Althusser's influence on Bourdieu, the place in social space that a particular group occupies is (mis)recognised as natural and legitimate, and reproduced through education (Riley, 2017). For Bourdieu, class structure represents the "entirety of the occupational division" which underpins the social system. Divisions within this system are formed by the ways that differing forms of capital, or "the set of actually usable resources and powers"

(Bourdieu, 1984: 114) are distributed. These forms of capital (economic, social, and cultural) are detailed later in the thesis. For Bourdieu, class is primarily about the ways that these forms of capital are unequally distributed, and the differing values that they hold in specific settings. As a result, actors' social locations are strongly informed by the *composition* of their capitals in such a way that the different social classes possess similar patterns of capitals (Bourdieu, 1984; Weininger, 2002). For Bourdieu, these differences are primarily expressed through different lifestyles (Weininger, 2002). This focus is particularly pertinent in this study which, broadly speaking, considers how particular social groups relate to services provided by the Tasmanian Government through LiL. The ways people are related to the means of production shapes reasons and opportunities for action, and what happens (or does not happen) as a result of action. What this means then, is that class informs life chances and outcomes such that social mobility is possible but constrained.

1.6. Chapter conclusion

Drawing primarily on the experiences of parents using universal early childhood education services in two Tasmanian communities experiencing disadvantage, this thesis makes an empirical and theoretical contribution towards a better understanding of how parents use and experience early childhood education services.

Using a combination of document analysis and fieldwork enabled me to conduct a multi-dimensional exploration of Tasmania's response to early childhood education. WPR Policy analysis (Bacchi, 2009) highlights some of the thinking and goals behind early childhood education policy in Australia. A further thematic analysis of Tasmanian parent information documents illuminates one way that these goals are communicated to parents. The ethnographic techniques which inform the largest part of this research, enabled me to explore the lived experiences of parents who use LiL, and to consider these in comparison to the view of teachers and other service providers. Together, these research techniques reveal a contextualised depiction of parent's experiences of universal early childhood education in Tasmania. A range of positive and negative experiences are detailed, and the enduring role of class is evident.

Chapter 2: Government Provision of Services, and Understandings of Beginning School.

This chapter provides essential background information that sets the scene for understanding how current approaches to early childhood education programs such as LiL and Kindergarten have come about.

The chapter has several sections. First is a discussion of the welfare state. This serves to introduce some of the different perspectives, values, and ideologies that underpin state approaches to providing support for the less wealthy, and the different ways that governments have sought to address social inequality through the provision of various services, including public education.

Leading on from this, the development of early childhood services, and the increasing involvement of the state in providing free access to these is outlined. This is followed by a discussion of contemporary understandings of child development. Finally, the concept of school readiness is detailed. School readiness, like the development of early childhood services and the welfare state, reflects values and ideologies and shapes ways of responding to a perceived need in the community. Approaches to school readiness are heavily influenced by contemporary understandings of child development.

Together, these four topics highlight that approaches to addressing social and educational inequalities through services are not clear cut. Rather, they have shifted and changed over time to reflect the current social and political ideologies. In making this clear, it can be understood that current service-based approaches to early childhood education are embedded within sociocultural and political narratives that have been shaped by their history.

2.1. The welfare state

The term welfare state is used to describe a situation where the state plays a key role in protecting and promoting the social and economic well-being of citizens. The welfare state reflects the idea that as citizens, children and their families should have access to necessary services regardless of their ability to pay. Broadly speaking, the welfare state aims to generate more equal life chances and outcomes amongst members of society. Mendes (2017: 2) defines the welfare state as:

State-protected minimum standards of income, health, housing, education and personal social services based on a notion of rights and entitlements rather than charity.

The right to education and the provision of public education by the state, can therefore be understood as one aspect of the welfare state. Early childhood education initiatives provide a type of aid to families through publicly funded services that aim to help lower income families.

The last three decades have seen a transformation and reduction of the welfare state throughout numerous countries including Australia, England, and the United States of America. This has been largely characterised by an increasing delegation of services to organisations from outside the state (Barnes, 2020). However, earlier approaches to the welfare state in Australia were more centralised.

Briggs (1961: 228) explains the primary mechanisms of the welfare state:

... first, by guaranteeing individuals and families a minimum income irrespective of the market value of their work or their property; second, by narrowing the extent of insecurity by enabling individuals and families to meet certain 'social contingencies' (for example, sickness, old age and unemployment); and third, by ensuring that all citizens without distinction of status or class are offered the best standards available in relation to a certain agreed range of social service

Aspects of the welfare state were established in many Western democracies following the Second World War. In Australia, it can be argued that Australian states have provided some degree of welfare support in various forms since colonisation in 1788. Early welfare endeavours were undertaken to care for the needs of "certain classes of society" (Mc Mahon et al., 2000: 6) including the sick, convicts, children, and Aboriginal peoples. The welfare provided to Aboriginal peoples however, was driven by the aim of converting them to live in ways that were more in line with the life styles of the colonisers (McCallum, 2014; McMahan et al., 2000) and was often experienced as an unwelcome interference. Despite some degree of state involvement, most social support during the early years of British settlement came from various benevolent societies, rather than through the direct efforts of the state (Herscovitch and Stanton, 2008).

Following the convict era, Government assistance was provided in the form of land grants, free education, assisted immigration and infrastructure provision (McMahon et al., 2000: 6-

7). Owing to the successes of the mining and wool industries, between 1850-1890, Australia was considered one of the richest countries in the world (McMahon et al., 2000: 7). Reflecting the dominant values of the time, government and private welfare provisions overall were scant. The welfare that was provided, was given only to those deemed 'deserving', so as not to encourage indolence (Mendes, 2017). However, the Depression of the 1890's saw export prices and wages collapse. This had a deleterious social and economic impact on a large portion of the Australian population (Mendes, 2017). Private charities were unable to cope with the dramatically increased scale of need. To address the problems of low export prices and wages, legislation was enacted that restricted the use of low-cost labour from overseas workers and Indigenous peoples (McMahon et al., 2000). This legislation gave rise to a new empowerment of the working class and the birth of the Australian Labor Party, with its goals to develop a 'welfare state' for the protection of Australian workers (McMahon et al., 2000; Mendes, 2017).

The two world wars had a significant influence on the development of the Australian welfare state. For example, World War I veterans were entitled to repatriation benefits. The Great Depression during the 1920's and 1930's, and World War II saw the beginnings of unemployment benefits, family allowance payments, and pensions for widows (McMahon et al., 2000: 7). It was during this time, that the term 'welfare state' started to become familiar in Australia (Garton and McCallum, 1996).

The 'welfare state' was broadly understood as a mechanism through which the state could act to alleviate some of the pitfalls of a market economy (Garton and McCallum, 1996: 118). From 1945-1974 the Australian economy generally enjoyed a time of prosperity. The growing economy meant that larger numbers of workers were needed, and immigration rates were high. Despite this, for the unemployed, pensioners, or families supported by female breadwinners, Australia's welfare expenditure was comparatively low (McMahon et al., 2000: 7-8) and poverty continued "in the midst of assumed plenty" (Beilharz et al., 1992: 90). This problem was not significantly challenged until the Whitlam Labor Government was elected with a welfare mandate in 1972 (Beilharz et al., 1992). The Whitlam Government enacted far reaching welfare reform that included the establishment of Medibank, which commenced on July 1, 1975. Medibank was created to provide equitable and efficient national health cover for all Australian citizens (Dammery, 2002). Other Whitlam

government welfare reforms were increased benefit levels, employment schemes, increased provision for child care centres, free university education, and the development of the Australian Assistance Plan which was intended to strengthen welfare services (Beilharz et al., 1992; Gerrard, 2015; McMahon et al., 2000). The 1980's however, saw a worldwide financial downturn. This brought an end to the period of Australian economic growth, and led to sharply increased inflation, unemployment and socioeconomic instability (Beilharz et al., 1992). These changes were accompanied by a resurgence in the popularity of economic liberalism, which delivered Liberal leader Malcom Fraser to Government in 1975, heralding "...a new era of retreat and crisis" and a subsequent 'winding back' of welfare services (Beilharz et al., 1992).

In more recent decades the welfare state has come under deepening pressure, with welfare reliance increasingly viewed as being indicative of a dangerous passivity and dependence on unearned support. Welfare recipients are pejoratively portrayed as weakening the economic position of their nation, and undermining Australian values (Stanford and Taylor, 2013). Families who rely on welfare support are broadly constructed as deviant, deficient, and 'dole-bludging' (Stanford and Taylor, 2013: 477). This moral stance against welfare reflects the characteristic 'extreme individualism' and meritocratic underpinnings of neoliberalism. Neoliberalism emphasises the 'market society' and the role of individuals as self-driven acquirers of goods and opportunities (Beilharz et al., 1992; Stanford and Taylor, 2013). In this view, welfare is understood more as 'charity', rather than a civil 'right'. Palley (2020: 588) extends this view, arguing that,

neoliberalism is engaged in a long-running campaign against the welfare state...Its goal is not to completely eliminate the welfare state. Instead it is to transmute the welfare state by shrinking it...

This perspective underpins the differences between economic liberalism and social liberalism, and remains a key discursive debate (Beilharz et al., 1992).

An increasing focus on individual level risk factors reflect the strong focus of Western neoliberal cultures on the centrality of actors in governing and negotiating their own life and outcomes (Olafsdottir et al., 2014). Reflecting this post 1980's individualised and moral perspective on health and wellbeing, governments have progressively engaged in a 'winding

back' of the welfare state and its provisions for families (Peterson et al., 1999). This undoing of the welfare state and its accompanying emphasis on privatisation, downsizing, rationing, and 'contracting out' of services, previously provided by the state, resulted in a profound modification of the public domain, such that previously established collective rights experienced rapid decline (Peterson et al., 1999). In April 2012, in his London address to the Institute of Economic Affairs, the then Liberal Federal Treasurer Joe Hockey emphatically proclaimed, "The Age of Entitlement is over", making the apparent end of the welfare state official. Globally, universal services have come under growing pressure to "do more with less", with "local budget holders increasingly expected to make and enact decisions to decommission (reduce or stop providing) services" (Harlock et al., 2018: 1).

There have been multiple, versions of welfare services operating in Australia since the early period of colonisation. These have been established in response to enduring situations of need. Inevitably, systems of care provision are accompanied by ethical standpoints that shape service goals and delivery. On a national scale, this can be observed in the ways that alternating Labor and Liberal Federal Governments have either bolstered or wound back the welfare state, in alignment with their respective party moral and fiscal values. Mendes (2017: 9) notes that the policies of the current Australian Government aim to motivate and discipline recipients of welfare such that they are reintegrated with "mainstream social values and morality". It can be argued then, that the Australian model of welfare continues to reflect its origins of seeking to persuade particular members of society to conform and become more 'civilised'.

As neoliberalism increases and services which were once understood as the responsibility of the state are privatised, so grows the focus on individual responsibility. The next section discusses the development of the early childhood education and care sector in Australia and outlines how service provision has changed in response to shifts in social and political ideals.

2.2. Overview of the historical background of ECEC services

The Protestant Reformation in 16th century Europe set in motion the establishment of mandated, universal education for children in Germany and later the United States. The earlier work of Martin Luther stimulated the strengthening of educational systems to promote an educated and 'morally sound' populous (McKinney, 2017). It was not until 1837

however, that the earliest Kindergarten was established, also in Germany (Bryant and Clifford, 1992). Froebel was one of the first scholars to argue that early childhood is a distinct and important phase in the life-course, worthy of special focus, developed the first educational toys, and coined the term 'Kindergarten', literally meaning 'children's garden' (Bryant and Clifford, 1992). Throughout the 1870's -1890's, often championed by inspired individuals, Kindertgartens emerged throughout Europe and the United States, and this momentum spread to Australia (Bryant and Clifford, 1992).

Whilst some Australian private schools offered Kindergarten at this time, they were usually only available to children from wealthy families. Children from lower income backgrounds were not offered access to early education, and it was not uncommon for young children to be left unattended in their homes or on the streets while their parents worked in poorly paid jobs to support their families (OECD, 2000). Some other parents sent their younger children to school with older siblings even though schools did not offer any special classes or care for them. In 1868 however, Tasmania was the first colony in what later became Australia, to introduce compulsory education. In New South Wales, concerns about inequitable access to education led to the development of the philanthropic Kindergarten Union of New South Wales in 1895, the first institution of its kind in Australia. The union was formed to deliver free early childhood education to children living in communities experiencing disadvantage, and continues to operate today, now known as KU (Brennan, 1998). When KU opened their first preschool in 1895, accessible "early education in Australia was born" (2020: np). By 1911 every Australian state had a similar association.

In 1905, a growing nationalist sentiment underpinned an increasing focus on children's welfare and development (Huntsman, 2013). Reflecting this mood, targeted support for working class employed mothers was offered with the development of the 'Day Nursery'. Operating between 7am and 6pm, day nurseries catered for infants as well as toddlers. Whilst Day Nurseries did not proliferate until post WWII, philanthropic organisations first started offering services for working mothers much earlier. In 1905 a group of "young and determined women" (SDN, 2020: np) formed the founding committee of the Sydney Day Nursery Association (SDN) "...to ease the overwhelming burden of care and anxiety, to enable [mothers] to keep their home and family together, and to supply to their little ones...wholesome and loving care" (2020: np). Children and babies at Day Nurseries were

cared for by nurses, who brought a health and wellbeing focus to their practice (Brennan, 1998; Spearitt, 1979). Throughout Australia and overseas, these differing aspects and foci of care between Kindergartens and Day Nurseries gave rise to a “perceived split between care and education” (OECD, 2000: 17) that has profoundly influenced the development of contemporary debates, policy, and service provision. In 1907, Italy’s first female doctor Maria Montessori, opened her *Casa dei Bambini*, or ‘Children’s House’ in Rome. The centre enabled Montessori to test and practice her own child-focussed educational theories and to provide quality early learning for children experiencing the highest levels of disadvantage, otherwise thought of as the city’s most ‘unschooled’ children (American Montessori Society, 2020; Mead, 2020).

During the following decades new associations formed across Australia to advocate for the establishment of free Kindergartens in communities experiencing disadvantage. The first Kindergartens reflected a growing understanding and interest in children’s early years and were often viewed as a way to socialise children, and as a place for teacher training (OECD, 2000). Notably, Kindergartens were not developed with the ideological view of supporting working mothers. Reflecting this, most only accepted children from the age of three years. They generally operated between the hours of 9am and 12 noon, as long periods spent being cared for outside of the home was considered harmful to children. The Second World War (1939-1945) however, led to some centres extending opening hours to support mothers who were engaged in paid employment during the war effort (OECD, 2000).

In 1939-40 the Australian Federal Government made an historic investment in early childhood education and care services, with the establishment of Lady Gowrie Child Centres in every Australian state capital (Theobald et al., 2013). Responding to poverty and the associated high rates of infant mortality, Lady Gowrie Centres were founded on a medical model of care and reflected growing concern about the physical and cognitive development of children living in low income areas (Battery Point Community Association, 2020). This was the first occasion that the Australian Federal Government contributed to the provision of services for young children. While other facilities operated at this time, they were predominantly funded through philanthropy. Lady Gowrie Child Centres aimed to improve children’s health and learning, and to provide support for parents. The Lady Gowrie Child Centre in Hobart, the first in Tasmania, opened in July 1939 at Battery Point.

Alongside these changes during the 1930's, educational psychology began to inform teaching practices, and promoted the view that children were born with a pre-set capacity for learning, or intelligence (Connell, 1982a: 24). This view was largely held to be irrefutable. During this period, intelligence testing and psychological theories heavily influenced the ways that education was structured, with older children being 'streamed' according to their perceived intelligence, capacity for learning and potential career pathway. Connell (1982a: 25) notes "in short, it led to the belief that educational inequality was basically a question of innate individual brains and talent".

In response to shifting social values following the Second World War, middle class parents became increasingly interested in sending their children to Kindergarten (OECD, 2000). In the 1940's and 1950's preschools and Kindergartens emerged throughout Australia and were often managed by parents. In the academic sphere of the 1950's and 1960's, a sociology of education emerged that focussed on better understanding educational inequality. A growing recognition that families from differing social classes often held different attitudes and parenting styles, further fuelled "pathological narratives" (Popkewitz, 2013: 441) and supported the popular view that class based differences in educational attainment and achievement were the result of inherent deficits in poorer families (Connell, 1982a: 26). Deficit views of inequality have informed a significant body of interventions and research, problematising families, parents and children, without significant examination of the social factors that produce and reproduce inequality. What was (and arguably remains) missing from these views is an acknowledgement of the ways that classifications (for example, intelligent, unintelligent, rich, poor) have informed research and interventions through "imposing limits and producing an order" (Bourdieu, 1984: 94). Much of this research focussed on working class families with the view of trying to understand why they were 'different' from the middle class, or not able to conform with middle class expectations. Cultural deprivation theory posits that an "attitude syndrome of 'cultural deprivation', based on environmental limitations and handicaps" (Friedman, 1967: 88) underpins class differences in educational success. From this approach, code theory emerged (Bernstein, 1961).

Code theory argued that 'elaborated' and 'restricted' linguistic codes correspond with class based cognitive abilities and presented the working classes as having verbal and cognitive

deficiencies, or 'restricted' linguistic codes (Jones, 2013). This had the (unintended) effect of stigmatising families who were not of the dominant middle or upper classes.

The 1960's and 1970's gave rise to a growth in Tasmanian State Government enthusiasm for early childhood services, and it was during this period that the Government merged existing Kindergartens into the Education Department (OECD, 2000). Kindergartens throughout Australia however, were unable to meet the growing needs of mothers who were participating in paid employment during the 1970's (OECD, 2000). The rise of the Women's Liberation Movement meant that organisations such as the KU in New South Wales came under deepening pressure to provide long day care. Many within such organisations however, remained opposed to this and continued to hold the view that long day care was deleterious to children. Reflecting this, childcare was only available to 7% of working mothers and single parents (Press and Wong, 2013: 54).

Driven by principles of social justice, the election of the Whitlam Labor Government in 1972 brought about significant changes to a wide array of social policy, including the provision of ECEC. Soon after the election, the Australian Pre-Schools Committee was established. The role of the Committee was to institute a strategy for one year of free preschool education for all Australian children, with a particular focus on families experiencing low socioeconomic positioning (Brennan, 1994; Press and Wong, 2013: 53-54). In response to continuing pressures from women's advocacy groups the *Child Care Bill (1972)* was introduced to Parliament on 10 October 1972. With the passing of the new *Child Care Act*, the Australian Federal Government announced comprehensive funding for childcare for the first time, formalising its involvement in childcare (AIHW, 1993; Theobald et al., 2013). The Act was developed to address growing concerns about the effects of disadvantage on children's development and increasing rates of women participating in paid employment outside of the domestic sphere. To this end, the Government introduced rebates and provided funding to support the establishment of long day care services and the employment of qualified teachers in early childhood centres (AIHW, 1993).

A struggling economy, economic rationalism, and ideological differences between the Whitlam and subsequent Fraser Governments saw the Fraser Liberal Government significantly reduce Commonwealth spending on childcare during the first years of the 1980's. One aspect of this strategy included the tightening of means testing for families' fee

rebates (AIHW, 1993). This meant that childcare became unaffordable for many low- and middle-income working families, resulting in a widening gap between demand for services and availability (Press and Wong, 2013: 66). Owing to this, childcare became an important issue during the election that saw the Hawke Labour Government take power in 1983. Through the development of the Prices and Incomes Accord in 1983 the Government expanded childcare arrangements, along with a range of social welfare policies (Press and Wong, 2013: 67). In the years that followed, a series of reports and investigations (see for example Watts and Patterson (1985)) sought to highlight the need for policies that supported improvements in the quality of early childhood services, which was seen to be in decline (Press and Wong, 2013). In 1989, Australia became a signatory to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) with the Convention being ratified in December 1990 (Alston and Brennan, 1991). The UNCRC formed “the single most comprehensive statement of children’s rights ever drawn up at the international level” (Alston and Brennan, 1991: iii).

In the early 1990’s the Hawke Government instituted a major policy shift with the expansion of fee subsidies to the private childcare sector, making care more affordable and underpinning the expansion of childcare places (AIHW, 1993). By the end of 1997 there were some 50,000 new childcare spaces. These catered for children from birth to full time school. For-profit centres ran 75% of day care places and long day care became the “fastest growing ‘industry’ in Australia” (Press and Wong, 2013: 79). Concerns remained however that day care, particularly for-profit day care, was not meeting the quality standard expected by families, particularly in terms of providing educational opportunities and overtly fostering child development through suitable activities. This led to a new system that connected funding for childcare providers to accreditation.

The new millennium brought a continuing pattern of reviews and reforms to the sector. A series of national and international reports highlighted issues in Australian ECEC (Fenech et al., 2012). Three major problems were identified: low levels of government funding in comparison to other OCED countries (Fenech et al., 2012; Sumsion, 2006), growing dependence on market mechanisms for service provision and a disjointed approach to policy and regulatory conditions (Fenech et al., 2012; Logan et al., 2015). These issues emerged against the backdrop of an expanding body of evidence recognising the positive

influence of quality ECEC experiences on child outcomes, and community concerns regarding service quality and the relatively unregulated growth of corporate childcare (Cheeseman and Torr, 2009; Sumsion, 2006). The Rudd Labor Government took power in 2007 and began work on the National Partnership Agreement for the National Quality Agenda for Early Childhood Education and Care, which was implemented in 2008. The Agenda sought to reinforce children's rights and promote increased access to childcare and other early childhood services. Significantly, this period marked the development of the *Early Years Learning Framework* (EYLF) (Department of Education and Training, 2009), Australia's first early childhood curriculum and (Press and Wong, 2013: 88). The EYLF is discussed in more detail in Chapter Five. The collapse of an Australian large-scale corporate care provider in 2008 triggered further reforms. In 2009 the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) implemented the *National Quality Framework* (NQF) for ECEC (COAG 2009) that was "...proposed to guide a comprehensive and newly integrated system of quality assurance for all children's services and programs..." (Tayler, 2016: 27). The NQF created a closer alignment between research evidence and ECEC quality standards, with the overarching goal of improving the outcomes of children and families (Logan et al., 2015). Under the broad ECEC schedule were numerous specific actions, including the provision of universal access to play-based pre-school programs for every child in the year before they commence full-time school (Cheeseman and Torr, 2009).

Today the ECEC sector has expanded and represents a wide array of services. Australia has a nationwide system of universal early childhood and family health services. Reflecting the ways in which the system developed however, these remain somewhat fragmented between states and territories (Schmied 2014: 1). Families can select from various service types, and often use a mix of services according to their needs (Cheeseman and Torr, 2009). Services are usually either centre based, including day care and pre-school, or home based, such as family day care (Tayler, 2016). Day care centres typically provide care on an all-day or part-day basis for children aged from six weeks to five years of age. In addition, outside school hours care, pre-school programs are often available at day care centres. Some family day care operators also have outside school hours care available to older children. The positive effect of high-quality early childhood education and care for the development of

children's' health, learning and general wellbeing is now widely recognised (Theobald et al., 2013) and research continues to explore this area.

In Australia, services are grouped by their management and economic structure as either 'community based', 'not-for-profit', or 'private for profit' (Tayler, 2016). State and local government services, community organisations, schools and churches are deemed 'not for profit', while the 'for profit' sector represents private businesses and corporations that typically specialise in the provision of long-day care. Australian Federal Government childcare benefit payments provide much of the income these centres receive, whilst 'not-for-profit' centres typically rely on significant financial support from their state or territory government (Tayler, 2016: 28). Overall however, the Australian Federal Government provides the most significant portion of ECEC funding. While pre-school and Kindergarten programs are funded by state and territory governments, these funds are largely drawn from transfers from the federal government through 'National Partnership' arrangements (Tayler, 2016).

In the last ten years, the Australian Government has focussed additional funding on services that support families in the early years, particularly the years prior to compulsory school attendance. A legacy of the separate foci on care and education that characterised the early development of Australian ECEC, there remains a disconnect between early childhood health and education services and policy structures. The Tasmanian Government is making strides towards better integrating education and care through Child and Family Centres (CFCs). CFCs are a significant step towards a more integrated way of providing services to families. CFCs will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Four.

Figure 1 (below) presents a timeline of the development of early childhood education and care in Australia. Table 1 (below) provides an overview of services currently available in Australia for the care of young children.

Figure 1: Timeline of development of ECEC

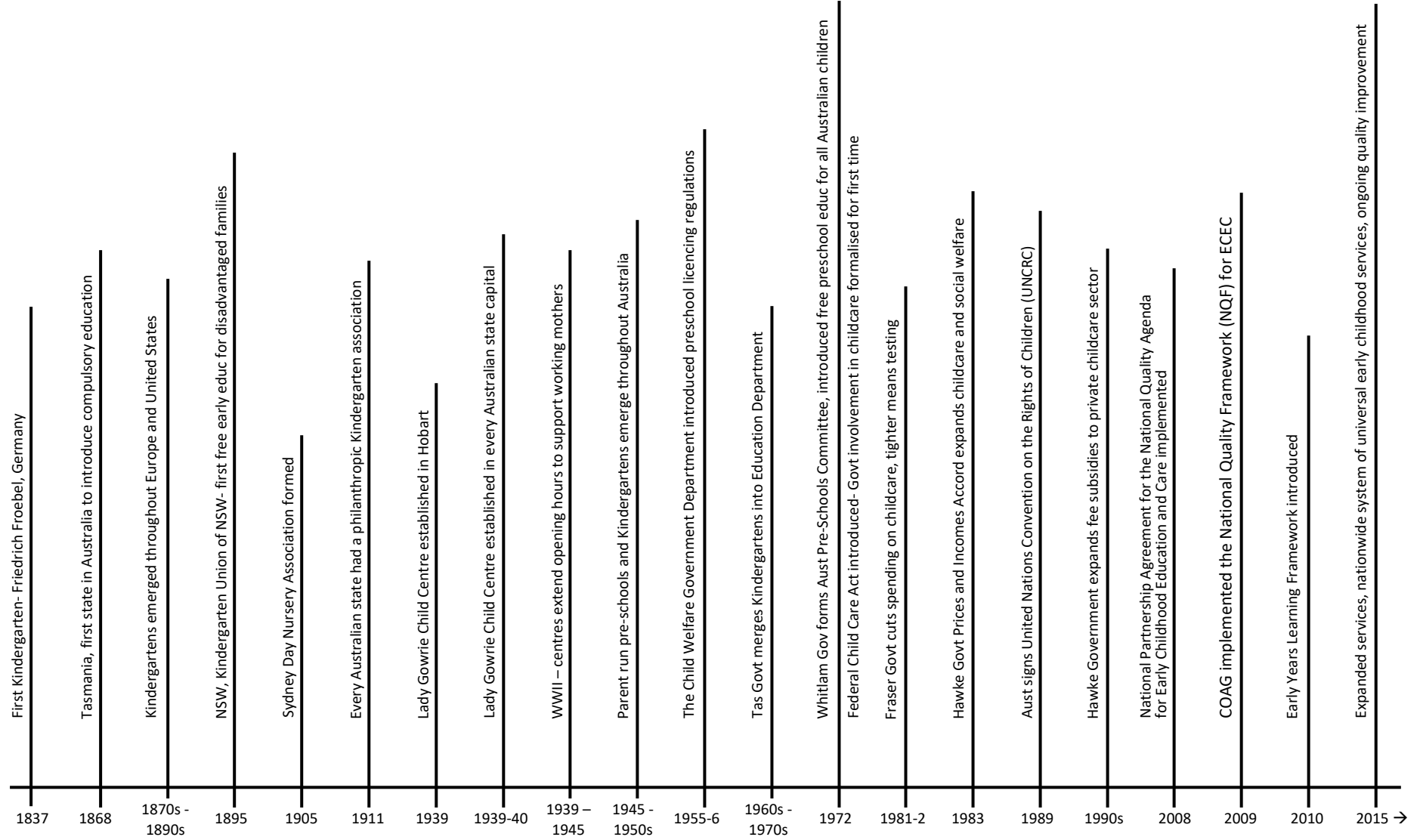


Table 1: Early Childhood Education and Care arrangements in Australia

Service Type	Setting	Funding	Staffing	Care provided	Child age
Long day care	Centres	Fees, Child Care Subsidy	Qualified educators, teachers ¹	All/part day	6 wks.- 5 yrs.
Family day care/ In home care	Carers home/Child's home	Fees, Child Care Subsidy	Qualified educator	Flexible, all day/part day	6 wks.- 5 yrs.
Occasional Care	Centres	Fees, Child Care Subsidy	Qualified educators, teachers	Short term	6 wks.- 5 yrs.
Outside School Hours Care/Vacation Care	Schools or centres	Fees, Child Care Subsidy	Qualified educators	Before and/or after school hours, and school holidays	School age
Pre-school/Kinder	Schools	State Governments Private Schools	Teachers and teacher assistants	Preparation for first year of compulsory education	3-5 yrs.
LiL (TAS)	Schools and CFC's	State Government	Teachers, teacher assistants	Early learning activities for children & parents/carers	Birth- 4 yrs.

Source: (DET 2020, DoE 2020).¹ Teachers are university qualified. Educators hold either certificate or diploma level qualifications.

In March 2020 there were 1, 318,900 Australian children (coming from 933,550) families who were attending approved childcare services. Approved care is care that is approved by the Australian Government to receive Child Care Benefit on families' behalf. There were 13,370 approved childcare services in Australia. These data highlight the strong demand for high quality ECEC (DET, 2020).

In Tasmania during March 2020 there were 262 approved childcare services, caring for 23,580 children. These children came from 16,490 families. Table 2 gives an overview of the numbers of Tasmanian children using approved care services, and the differing types of services being utilised (DET, 2020).

Table 2: Number of children (and families) using childcare by service type, Tasmania and National, March quarter (DET, 2020)

Service Type	Tasmania	National
Long Day Care (centre based, all/part day care)	13, 080 (10,540)	785,040 (635,940)
Family Day Care/In-Home Care (care in educators' own homes/children's' homes)	3, 310 (2,410)	107,670 (74,380)
Outside School Hours Care/Vacation Care (school aged children, before or after school hours or during school holidays)	9,030 (6,380)	489,800 (355,710)
Total	23, 580 (16,490)	1,318,900 (933,550)

From their beginnings, services for young children have sought to foster positive experiences and development. Services for the care and education of young children have broadened in scope. There has been a shift from moral standpoints that kept access to services limited, to a nationwide proliferation of services and broad encouragement for participation from the earliest age. Current ECEC services retain an enduring focus on fostering children's early learning and development. The next section discusses the contemporary understandings of early childhood development that shape early learning programs.

2.3. Changing understandings of child development: The importance of the early years

Reflecting the influence of developmental psychology on understandings of child development, educational discourses have been shaped by 'grand theories' that emphasise particular views of what all children *should* be able to *do* at particular ages and stages (Andrew and Fane, 2019: 30). Developmental theories have been dominant in early childhood education and have tended to "privilege development over learning" (Grieshaber, 2008: 508). Notable examples are Jean Piaget's highly influential four stage theory of

cognitive development (Piaget, 1954) and Erik Erikson's (1950) eight psychosocial stages theory (Andrew and Fane, 2019: 30). There is a growing body of literature that is underpinned by critical theory, the assumption that "all knowledge is socially constructed...it is intimately tied to its producers" (Ryan and Greishaber, 2004: 45). This view shifts the emphasis away from developmental and deficit theories of early childhood, towards more holistic understandings of children and families. Regardless, developmental approaches remain highly influential and continue to proliferate (see for example Saracho and Evans, 2021).

Whilst there is debate around the ongoing importance of developmental psychological approaches to early childhood education, there is no debate that the first years in a child's life form the foundation of their future. The contemporary research literature is unequivocal that children's ongoing development, health and wellbeing are fundamentally influenced and shaped by what happens to them during the early years (COAG, 2009).

During the last two decades, evidence from multiple disciplines including neuroscience, molecular biology, epigenetics, psychology, sociology and genomics have come together to confirm the centrality of early experiences on brain development (Centre on the Developing Child at Harvard University, 2010; Jose et al. 2020a; Shonkoff and Garner, 2012). The growing body of contemporary literature overwhelmingly supports the view that the early years are crucial to successful development and positive life chances. Adversities can accumulate from pre-conception through to children's first years of life, causing disturbances to brain development, children's attachments, and learning (Black et al., 2016). Early 'nurturing care' (health, nutrition, safety and security, responsive caregiving, and early learning) significantly influences children's development. Environments that support nurturing care include high quality early learning settings (Black et al., 2016: 77). Children's abilities to learn and develop new skills during middle childhood, adolescence and adulthood are dependent on "foundational capacities" which arise from preconception and early childhood (Black et al., 2017: 79). In addition (and of particular sociological interest), the influence of socioeconomic positioning on children's development is well established.

Socioeconomic status (SES) has the potential to influence early childhood development in several ways (Phillips and Shonkoff, 2000). For example, when compared with their peers from more socioeconomically advantaged backgrounds, children who are living in the most

disadvantaged areas are 30% more likely to be of low birthweight, 60% more likely to have dental caries, and are more likely to be considered developmentally vulnerable upon commencing school (AIHW, 2011). Supporting this, neuroscientific studies highlight a range of differences in brain development between children living in poverty and those of greater socioeconomic advantage (Black et al., 2017: 80). Subsequently, social and economic disadvantage are strongly connected to a developmental school readiness gap between children from differing backgrounds. Over the last twenty years, responses to SES based educational disparities have become increasingly informed by emerging understandings of child development and learning (Savage, 2016) and in 2009, the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) developed a National Early Childhood Development Strategy, with the aim of ensuring that “by 2020 all children have the best start in life to create a better future for themselves and for the nation” (COAG, 2009: 4).

As a result of this expanding field of knowledge, the conditions in which children are born and raised, have come to be regarded as an intrinsic part of the acquisition of the skills and attributes that are expected of children upon school entry (Janus and Duku, 2007: 376). This focus has given rise to a broad array of programs within diverse disciplinary fields including education, health, and human services (Shonkoff and Garner, 2012). There is wide agreement that children receive a range of benefits from participation in high quality early education initiatives (Petitclerc et al., 2017). One area of focus for educators is ‘school readiness’. School readiness seeks to instil in children and their families a range of skills that are broadly understood as prerequisites for successful transitioning into schooling. The next section introduces the concept of school readiness and the different ways in which is conceptualised.

2.4. Beginning school and school readiness

The beginning of a child’s schooling is a period of significant change and adjustment for families and children (Dockett et al., 2012). It is widely accepted, both in the literature and amongst educators in schools, that a ‘good start’ is associated with long-term benefits to children (Boyle et al., 2018; Dunlop and Fabian, 2007). As noted by Taylor et al. (2017: 1496) evidence for the enduring nature of children’s early life experiences is supported “globally, and without exception”. Differences in early experiences mean that children do not enter

their school years on an equal 'playing field'. The result is that children from low income backgrounds typically enter school less 'ready', and less likely to have a 'good start' to their education. This is significant as children who are 'school ready' are more likely to have a positive transition into schooling, as well as improved lifelong learning, and life chances (High, 2008; Janus and Duku, 2007). As a result, school readiness is receiving increased attention as a mechanism for improving children's educational and social outcomes; however, the concept of school readiness is not new. The efficacy of early childhood programs in supporting children's readiness for school is similarly established (for Australian, Irish, American, Icelandic examples, see Dockett and Perry (2007), Kiernan et al. (2008), Laverick (2008), and Winter (2011) respectively).

Pestalozzi introduced the idea of school readiness in 1898, (Kagan and Rigby, 2003; Pestalozzi, 1915) and it began to inform Kindergarten practices in the United States during the 1920's (Kagan and Rigby, 2003). However, it was not until the 1990's that advances in neuro-psychology and early childhood development were made, that the previously narrow understanding of children's school readiness gave way to a more expansive and holistic perspective (Janus and Duku, 2007: 375; Shonkoff and Garner, 2012: 234). As a result, it became increasingly apparent that the skills and attributes associated with school readiness develop from (and before) birth. Subsequently, the conditions in which children are born and raised came to be seen as an intrinsic part of the acquisition of the skills and attributes that were expected of children upon school entry (Janus and Duku, 2007: 376). This means that factors including socio-emotional development were explicitly considered for the first time. It has become increasingly apparent that children who are raised with the experience of disadvantage, or less nurturing conditions, are more likely to struggle to reach their full potential in regard to their health, behaviour, and learning development (Manfra, 2019). An array of disciplines including sociology, economics, molecular biology, neuroscience, genomics, developmental psychology, and epidemiology have converged to support this perspective (Shonkoff and Garner, 2012: 232). Consequently, it is now understood that early childhood experiences have an enduring impact on children's lives, and this more complex multi-faceted view continues to guide school readiness research, interventions and practices.

School readiness is a widely used, but somewhat difficult to define concept. Despite several decades of scholarship on the topic, the meaning of 'school readiness' and how it is that children obtain and display it is ambiguous and culturally mediated. Broadly, the term 'school readiness' is often used by teachers, school leaders, and policy makers to encapsulate an array of skills and aptitudes in individual children on their commencement of schooling. Aspects of school readiness include cognitive development, physical and health and wellbeing, general knowledge, social and emotional development, language and communication, attitudes to learning, and classroom behaviour and compliance (Domitrovich et al., 2012; Guhn et al., 2016; Miller and Kehl, 2019).

As noted by Powell (2010: 27) readiness means "different things to different people...teachers have a different idea of school readiness than parents do, and politicians have a different notion than paediatricians". What is clear, is that a child's readiness status informs an array of policies, strategies, and decisions that affect young children (Kagan and Rigby, 2003) and that for children from low income backgrounds, a smooth transition into schooling can begin a process of overcoming intergenerational disadvantage (COAG, 2009). Powell (2010: 28) may well be correct that "Defining readiness is akin to trying to catch the wind. Readiness exists in the minds of adults, not in the minds of children". Regardless, to understand how it shapes the experiences of families, children, and teachers, it is helpful to address some of the main ways in which it has been conceptualised and applied.

Views of school readiness (SR) and what it means are shaped by their underlying theoretical perspectives. Meisels (1999) provides a description of the four key theoretical perspectives that form the basis of current and previous approaches to readiness. *The maturationist perspective* posits that children's development naturally follows a biological timeline, and that children will learn when they are ready (Meisels, 1999: 47). Maturationists argue that this timeline is inbuilt and that interventions cannot bring readiness about any earlier. The logical conclusion of this view is that a child who does not develop readiness within the expected time frame, is at fault in some way. This view neglects the role of the environment and adults in children's development (Dockett and Perry, 2002).

The environmental perspective considers the demonstration of universal skills and attributes related to schooling as key signifiers of school readiness. The ability to name colours, shapes, or count to ten are seen as examples of readiness (Meisels, 1999: 47). From this

view, SR is seen as a specific and measurable state that can be imparted through special learning programs that teach particular knowledges (Dockett and Perry, 2002).

The social constructivist perspective highlights the subjective nature of SR. Social constructivists argue that SR exists in the context of broader socio-cultural factors and influences. That is, SR is “generated in a specific context and [has] meaning only in that context” (Dockett and Perry, 2002: 71). This understanding of readiness acknowledges that one set of skills or attributes might be advantageous in some schools and contexts, but not others. Rather, what are considered desirable attributes are culturally and socially contingent, and variability is not constructed as weakness or ineptitude (Dockett and Perry, 2002: 71).

The interactionist perspective sees SR as a relative, context specific concept that incorporates aspects of maturationalist, environmental, and social constructivist perspectives. SR is understood to reflect a multi-way interaction between children’s characteristics, culture, experiences, and the environment. Ecological models, often based on the work of Bronfenbrenner (1979) (see also Bronfenbrenner and Morris, 2006) attempt to incorporate these holistic, multiple factors that shape children’s development and school readiness (see for example Mollborn (2016), Pianta et al. (1999)). Ecological approaches recognise and respond to the ways that a child’s transition to schooling occurs within an interrelated suite of contexts.

Regardless of the theoretical view Bates (2019) critiques the concept and contends that universally implicit in school readiness approaches is the aim to foster the development of standardised attributes of ‘school ready’ children that are guided by culturally contingent understandings of time and children’s development. Reflecting this, the OECD has implemented an international comparative study that creates a globalised measure of emerging attributes amongst five-year-old children across the domains of literacy, numeracy, self-regulation, empathy and trust (Bates, 2019; OECD, 2017). This standardised approach to readiness is not unproblematic. There continues to be much disagreement both in Australia and other countries about what school readiness is, what is the best way to create and nurture readiness, and what the main goals and purposes of early childhood education are (see for example Dockett and Perry, 2002; Janus and Duku, 2007; Kocak and Incekara, 2020; Kokkalia et al., 2019; Snow, 2006). Broadly speaking, school readiness is

open to critique as being reductionist and can lead to what Bourdieu refers to as ‘symbolic violence’. That is, school readiness reflects the values of a disciplinary field and social class. As such, school readiness may operate to enforce, produce and reproduce the types of capitals that are preferred by the dominant middle class. School readiness itself may be an arbitrary set of goals or expectations that some families may never attain. This will be discussed further in later chapters. Regardless, school readiness and the various ways in which it can be understood and measured form the foundations of early childhood services such as LiL. This means it is essential to consider the ways in which the concept has developed and can be enacted.

Earlier conceptualisations of school readiness were heavily focussed on a child’s abilities to perform particular tasks that were understood to signify a readiness to learn and transition into the school environment. Further complicating the matter, school readiness literature has often blurred together the separate but related concepts of readiness to learn, and readiness for school (Kagan and Rigby, 2003). An ongoing emphasis on psychometric testing of children suggests that a focus on individual task-based capabilities endures (Christensen et al., 2020).

However, there is growing recognition that school readiness consists of interrelated, multi-part elements; children’s readiness for learning and development; schools’ readiness for children, in terms of the environment and practices that facilitate smooth transitions into schooling; and family readiness in relation to attitudes and engagement in children’s early learning and transition into schooling (High, 2008). Kagan and Rigby (2003) offer a four-part equation; Ready families + Ready early childhood services + Ready communities + Ready schools = Ready children. This perspective is supported by more recent research (see for example Christensen et al., 2020). These multi-part models attempt to overcome some of the problems of reductionism that are inherent in more narrow conceptions of school readiness. Views of school readiness that are solely child-focussed and competency based neglect that it does not develop in isolation but rather, school readiness comes about through complex and intertwined influences that reflect the ecologies in which children are located (Christensen et al., 2020; Mashburn and Pianta, 2006).

This approach, widely utilised in Finland, Norway, and Sweden de-emphasises child-based attributes and the idea of ‘making school ready children’ and considers instead how schools

and educators can best support children through the learning process (Bingham and Whitebread, 2012: 6). Schools that are 'ready' can support children and their families, facilitating the development of school readiness (2008). 'Ready schools' provide families with transition support, connections with other early years services, teachers with a sound understanding of early childhood learning and development, and the agility to respond to the varying needs of children and their families (2008). This view understands that children's development is not the sole responsibility of parents. Whilst this concept is gaining popularity in Australia, the focus in the literature remains skewed towards 'ready children' and family readiness.

The ready schools perspective argues that the key focus should not be on 'whether a child is ready to learn' but 'how adults can best support the processes of learning' (Bingham and Whitebread, 2012). This approach responds to the idea that "no one skill can by itself contribute to children's school success" (Janus and Duku, 2007: 376) by shifting the emphasis away from perceived child and family deficits. The emphasis then, is not what children need to know or be able to do when they start school, but what schools need to do to meet the diverse needs of children. This re-formulated view focusses on the readiness of schools to respond to inevitable differences in children and families' preparedness for schooling (Fabian and Dunlop, 2002) and has been broadly accepted in countries such as Finland, Norway and Sweden. This 'social pedagogy' supports children's social, emotional and intellectual development in ways that are embedded in multiple social contexts (Bingham and Whitbread, 2012). Ready schools:

...instead of lamenting the supposedly low levels of some children...understand that all children are at different places at different times...[and] meet children where they are (Powell, 2010: 27-28).

This view can be expanded to include community school readiness (Kokkalia et al., 2019). Community school readiness focuses on the ways that communities provide support for the development of children during their earliest years of life. Communities that are supportive of children's early development are those that provide a range of supports to families and children that operate to maximise early development (Kokkalia et al., 2019). Tasmanian services such as CFCs and LiL aim to contribute to this early development.

School readiness influences policy, teaching and the ways that families experience education settings. It is therefore important to recognise that school readiness is, at its core a set of subjective, socially constructed understandings that arise from community norms, values and expectations. What constitutes a school ready child then, can vary between and within communities and schools (Brooks-Gunn and Markman, 2005; Kokkalia et al., 2019). Understanding this creates scope for focus to be redirected on the school and the community, creating opportunities to explore what school readiness means to teachers and parents at a given site, rather than applying a broad-brush definition of readiness to all children. Owing to the varying nature of SR understandings, focussing on an individual school's readiness to meet and adapt to the needs of students is a useful strategy... "In other words, readiness is no longer mainly seen as a condition of the child. It is also being seen as a condition of families, of schools, and of communities" (Kokkalia et al., 2019: 10). High (2008) argues that if school readiness is to be measure or assessed, it should be understood as an outcome measure of the impact of community-based support programs, rather than as a measure of children's and families' deficits (High, 2008). This view is becoming more widely supported in the literature and is particularly relevant when considering school communities that are characterised by low socioeconomic positioning. These families are often positioned as problematic in relation to school readiness and school transitions. As noted by (De Witt et al., 2020: 28-29)

School-readiness should be viewed as a collective responsibility with schools, support structures in the community and parents/caregivers working together to ensure the child's successful transition into, and achievement in, formal education.

Parents' understandings of school readiness, what it is and what their roles are in supporting children's school readiness, are also important. As parents often spend the most significant amount of time with children during their early years, their role in nurturing school readiness is significant (Altun, 2018). There is evidence that parents' conceptualisations of school readiness differ between those of low and high socioeconomic positioning, and that these understandings influence home learning practices (Puccioni, 2019). Subsequently, there is a need for more research into how parents understand school readiness (De Witt et al., 2020). Play based early learning programs such as LiL provide children with opportunities to interact with their peers and other adults, explore new

environments, and participate in learning activities. Children's attendance at play-based programs is associated with improved school readiness (Sincovich et al., 2020). This thesis makes a contribution to improved understandings of how parents who utilise a free play based educational learning program, understand school readiness.

2.5. Chapter conclusion

This chapter has presented an overview of the historical, political and ideological background of early childhood education and care services in order to provide context for the current early years education approaches and LiL which are the focus of this study.

In combination, Chapters One and Two established that whilst young children benefit from early education, access to this is socially contingent. Western governments have a focus on reducing educational disparities through the provision of early childhood interventions. LiL is a universal early childhood education program provided by the Tasmanian government that seeks to respond to and address the social gradient of education. The historical development of contemporary approaches to early childhood education were detailed and it was established that this was a two-pronged development shaped by early, separate models of care and education. Together, these services have informed the development of current service delivery and design, including that of LiL. The welfare state was discussed to demonstrate some of the ways that governments have acted to intervene in social inequality, and to highlight how different political ideologies bring inherently different approaches to social disadvantage and its associated problems. With the increase of neoliberalism, approaches have shifted towards interventions that focus on the individual.

Connected to this is the concept of school readiness, which focusses on individual children and families, and is used to explain, quantify, and act upon broader socioeconomically patterned differences in children's development and transitions into schooling. This matters because prevailing ideas about school readiness inform the ways that services such as LiL operate, engage with parents and children, and the outcomes they seek to create. The next chapter, Chapter Three presents the work of Pierre Bourdieu which forms the theoretical background for the ethnographic methods and major part of this study. Bourdieu's central concepts of habitus, field, capitals and symbolic violence are explained, along with a

description of the ways that this work has been used in recent sociological examinations of education.

Chapter 3: Theoretical Background: Bourdieu and this Study

3.1. Introduction

The key theoretical approach that informs this thesis is the work of Pierre Bourdieu, a prolific and influential French sociologist (Grenfell, 2014). Bourdieu's 'Outline of a Theory of Practice' (1972) presents a suite of concepts (habitus, field and capitals) that form the foundation of his approach to examining everyday life. Over his lifetime, Bourdieu developed a range of key theoretical concepts to assist in analysing social behaviour. Bourdieu's concepts are of particular utility for considering education and social reproduction, as investigation of these were important aspects of much of his work. This is pertinent to this study, which takes place in early childhood education settings, but primarily focuses on the experiences of parents, rather than children. I focussed on parents, as I wanted to gain insight into ways to better support parents' participation in services, as children can only access services through their parents. While Bourdieu's work has been accused of determinism, others argue that his theoretical concepts are flexible and applicable to multiple research applications. I share this perspective and value the attempts made by Bourdieu to develop a framework that overcomes the binary oppositions of structure and agency.

This chapter gives a brief introduction to Bourdieu's early background, his work, and influence. It then outlines several of his most influential theoretical concepts or 'thinking tools' (Wacquant, 1989), focusing on habitus, capital(s), and field. A Bourdieusian account of symbolic violence is also explained. The concept of symbolic violence is pertinent to this study as it connects to the possibility of unintended negative consequences in the ways that LiL operates and engages with families. A brief explanation of how Foucauldian inspired document analysis is complimentary to the work of Bourdieu will also be provided. Critiques of Bourdieu will be discussed, most notably, accusations of determinism. Finally, examples of how Bourdieusian theories have been applied in contemporary examinations of education and education settings are given along with an explanation of how this work will be applied to my study.

3.2. Pierre Bourdieu

Pierre Bourdieu was born in 1930 in the rural province Bearn, France. The son of a postal worker, Bourdieu grew up living with relative disadvantage (Dalal, 2016; Jenkins, 1992).

Bourdieu was a capable student, and with the financial support of a scholarship, he was the first in his family to complete high school. He was subsequently accepted into the exclusive Ecole Normal Supérieure where he studied philosophy (Dalal, 2016; Jenkins, 1992).

Bourdieu's own experiences as a student in the highly stratified education system of rural France and his uncommon journey from rural peasantry to academia contributed to his heightened awareness of the influence and power of social structures, and the role of education in social reproduction (Dalal, 2016; Sallaz and Zavisca, 2007).

During the 1950's Algerian War for Independence, Bourdieu was drafted into the French Army. His experiences in this period inspired Bourdieu's first major study into the Kabyle people's colonisation experiences (Sallaz and Zavisca, 2007). This study gave rise to 'Outline of a Theory of Practice' (1972) and then 'The Logic of Practice' (1980). These important texts detail Bourdieu's theories of social structure and social action. When he returned to France from Algeria, Bourdieu began his examination of the reproduction of inequality.

Bourdieu published more than 25 books and 300 academic articles (Jenkins, 1992). Broadly speaking, his works shared a common theme of deconstructing social inequality through a focus on language, elite schools, housing, consumption and cultural production (Sallaz and Zavisca, 2007). Consequently, Bourdieu's work made an important contribution to the scholarship of numerous disciplines including fine art, language, science, law, philosophy, media studies, history and education. Power is an overarching focus of Bourdieu's work, and he examined this primarily through the lens of education and the role of the State (Dalal, 2016). An important aspect of this work is the exposure of the unseen or 'shadowy' structural aspects of education (Beckman et al., 2018, Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977).

Despite scant explicit writing on education policy, his work had a strong focus on classroom practices, and the ways that schools and education shape and influence societies through cultural domination and reproduction of class structure (Zanten, 2005, Beckman et al., 2018).

For Bourdieu, schools act as a contemporary substitute for the powerful role previously occupied in feudal society, by the church. That is, the school autonomously performs the functions of socialisation and legitimisation, which reinforces the status of the dominant classes. Formerly, these positions were the domain of religious institutions (Zanten, 2005). Education is imbued with the legitimacy and power to bestow (or not to bestow) social legitimacy upon its users through processes that ultimately determine whether one succeeds or fails at schooling (Dalal, 2016: 236). Educational success has far reaching implications for individual's life chances and opportunities (Lareau, 2011; Podesta, 2014). Therefore, educational institutions can exert immense power over lives, in a similar way that churches once did.

3.3. Central concepts

Rejecting the prevailing French post-war binaries of structuralism (Claude Levi-Strauss) and phenomenology (Jean-Paul Sartre) Bourdieu argues that social reality arises from the lived experience of *both* the objective and subjective (Dalal, 2016; King, 2005). Theorists who view structure as dominant see the position of individuals as heavily constrained by dominating social forces and structures (Dreher and López, 2015: 197). Conversely, those who favour agency, view society as a flexible and “plastic creation of human subjects” (Giddens, 1984: 26) that is open to a range of individual actions. For Bourdieu, the lived realities of human social life are obscured by these oppositions, which he saw as artificial (Bourdieu and Waquant, 1992: 10). To this end, Bourdieu has described his approach as “structuralist constructivism or a constructivist structuralism” (Bourdieu and Waquant, 1992: 11). Subsequently, Bourdieu developed the interrelated concepts of habitus, capitals, and field which fundamentally challenged the established paradigms for interpretation of social life (Dalal, 2016; Jenkins, 1992). Bourdieu (1984: 101) illustrates how his interrelated concepts give rise to social practice through the formula: (habitus) (capitals) + field = practice. These overlapping constructs represent the most significant of Bourdieu's ‘thinking’ devices (Jenkins, 1992). Habitus, capitals and field are valuable concepts with which to consider a broad range of social issues including social disadvantage and education. Bourdieu's work contributes a sound theoretical foundation for this study which seeks to understand the ways that agents interact with the established structural organisation of ‘the school’. Further, Bourdieu's concepts lend themselves well to this study

through examining relationships between the consumption and production of goods (and by extension, early childhood education services) (Bourdieu, 1984; Vigerland and Borg, 2018). The utility of Bourdieu's approach to consumption is in the way that it highlights that 'taste' is more than individual choice. He argues rather that taste and consumption are 'weaponised' to highlight differences that may be used to classify what is legitimate, and what is not (Allen and Anderson, 1984).

3.4. Habitus

'Habitus' or derivations of the term have been variously adopted by a range of theorists to understand and explore how people, and groups of people possess particular and lasting dispositions. Originating in the work of Aristotle as 'hexis' and then Boece as 'habere' to reflect the significance of 'the habit', the concept was later utilised by Thomas Aquinas to investigate the ways that faith develops (Naaman, 2017; Sapiro, 2015: 484). Weber also used the concept to investigate faith and religious salvation to such that it "refers to a virtuous way of life based on deliberately adopted habits" (Sapiro, 2015: 484). Habitus has been further utilised by sociologists including Husserl, Mauss, Merleau-Ponty, Elias, and Bourdieu (Loyal and Quilley, 2020; Sapiro, 2015: 484).

As a central Bourdieusian concept, habitus is a set of "durable and transposable dispositions...integrating all past experiences...a matrix of perceptions, appreciations, and actions" (Bourdieu, 1977: 261). Habitus was developed from Bourdieu's 1950's examinations of Algerian 'de-peasanted peasants' (Bourdieu, 1977) who were displaced into French army resettlement villages as a result of the Algerian War (1952-1962). This work formed the empirical foundations of habitus (Silverstein and Goodman, 2009) and went on to become widely used throughout the social sciences to explore the relationship between actors and their environments (Clarkin-Phillips, 2018).

Largely the product of early childhood (Podesta, 2014; Reay et al., 2009), habitus becomes internalised in people through daily life experiences, and it usually exists beyond the level of awareness, seeming to be the actors 'nature' (Bourdieu, 1990: 54-56). Succinctly, habitus is "a complex interplay between past and present" (Reay et al., 2009, 2). Bourdieu (1990: 316) describes habitus as the way that "society becomes deposited in persons in the form of lasting dispositions, or trained capacities and structured propensities to think, feel and act in

determinate ways". Habitus is informed and contributed to by the ways in which social agents understand the value of their cultural, social, and economic capitals in a given social field (Barrett and Martina, 2012: 251) and underscores ingrained ways of understanding and living in the world (McNay, 1999). For Bourdieu, this produces embodied experiences that occur within objective structures (see Bourdieu, 1990). Habitus reflects the interrelatedness of actors and their social experiences such that "it is not just the body that is in the social world, but it is also the social world that is in the body" (Dalal, 2016: 234).

Bourdieu argues habitus has a powerful and enduring (but not unyielding) influence in the education setting, that subsequently informs academic success and reproduces social disadvantage. He argues that students from more privileged middle-class families commence their school life imbued with the types of habitus, and dispositions that align naturally with the school environment. These students then, are more likely to enter their schooling years primed to succeed. Their transition into school is easier, and they more quickly adapt to the setting. As a result, they are often understood more widely as 'ready' for the school setting (Nash, 1990). Conversely, students from working-class or family backgrounds affected by socioeconomic disadvantage often have habituses and dispositions that are less congruent with that of the school setting (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977). This discord can stimulate the development of a more socially approved habitus and positive outcomes for some working-class students. However, it can also create feelings of deep unease, discomfort, and tension (Reay et al., 2009: 3). These children are therefore disadvantaged in schooling from the outset, and a lack of alignment between the school and home habitus often presents obstacles throughout schooling. Students from backgrounds characterised as working-class or disadvantaged are less likely to 'succeed' at school. While this is largely attributable to students encountering a 'fish out of water' experience, lower educational attainment is often constructed as ineptitude for learning and academic endeavour. Bourdieu argues that this stratified aspect of education is concealed, such that middle-class school dominance is assumed as a natural result of superior intelligence (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977; Dalal, 2016). Subsequently, working class students are more likely to develop a feeling that school is 'not for us' and a negative view of education that is replicated across generations (Reay et al., 2009).

Flowing from the habitus, is capital(s) (Reay et al., 2009). Children and their families enter the education system equipped with varying types and levels of capital that simultaneously shape, and are shaped by, habitus. In the next section of this chapter, I outline Bourdieu's constructs of capitals and the ways that they may influence families' experiences of education.

3.5. Capitals

It is what makes the games of society- not least, the economic game- something other than simple games of chance offering at every moment the possibility of a miracle (Bourdieu, 1986: 15).

The Bourdieusian concept of capitals provides a way to examine social inequalities, power and power relations, differences between social classes, and the mechanisms by which social inequality is reproduced (Clarkin-Phillips, 2018). The ability of an individual to achieve success in any field is governed by their capital, or capitals (Beckman et al., 2018). In most cases I refer to capitals in the plural form, in recognition that there are multiple forms of capital that interact and intersect to shape people's experiences. I refer to the singular when pertinent to discussing a discrete type or form of capital. Capitals are particularly pertinent in relation to education and student outcomes, or one's ability to 'play the game' (Beckman et al., 2018; DiMaggio, 1982). Bourdieu's capital emphasises the point that "...it takes more than measured ability to do well in school" (DiMaggio, 1982: 189).

Broadly speaking, capitals are any resource that has value: cultural, material, symbolic or social (Navarro, 2006). Capital refers to a "potential capacity to produce profits" (Bourdieu, 1986: 15). For Bourdieu, all capitals are connected to economic capital. That is, social and cultural capitals arise from having economic capital, and the possession of economic capital fosters social and cultural capitals (Rogosic and Baranovic, 2016). Capital therefore, is "accumulated labour...in its materialised form..." (Bourdieu, 1986: 15). Capitals are unevenly distributed, and their possession is synonymous with the possession of power (Bourdieu, 1986: 16; Jenkins, 1992: 85), and therefore has a foundational role in the proliferation and maintenance of social inequality. Education is broadly associated with the accumulation of cultural and social capitals (Thomson, 2012). This is particularly relevant to the present study. Families living in low socioeconomic status communities often have differential access to the capitals that help them to negotiate the institution of the school. This means

that families who are often clustered in communities living with disadvantage, may not possess the types of capitals that are most valued in schools (Mills and Gale, 2004). Bourdieu outlines three distinct forms of capital; economic, social, and cultural. For Bourdieu, all forms of capital can be exchanged for another, and all accumulate through various acts of investment and utilisation of resources (Bourdieu 1993a). Like all of his concepts, Bourdieu's capitals are not intended to be considered in isolation, but rather should be understood as a set of overlapping assets (Reay, 2004). The different capitals are imbued with varying social values, and the different social classes possess these in different quantities (Bourdieu, 1986). It is the unequal distribution of capital between the classes that gives rise to class distinctions (Reay, 2004).

Bourdieu's conception of class structure encapsulates the "entirety of the occupational division" which forms a social system. What differentiates one division of the system from another, is the distribution of the forms of capital or "the set of actually usable resources and powers" (Bourdieu, 1984: 114). Class for Bourdieu then, is primarily about forms of capital, their unequal patterns of distribution, and the differing values that they hold in specific settings. Consequently, actors' overall social locations are primarily determined by the particular *composition* of their capitals such that the social classes are characterised by similar patterns of capitals (Bourdieu, 1984; Weininger, 2002). Bourdieu views different lifestyles, as reflections of different social class locations which are enacted through the *habitus* (Weininger, 2002). It is in part, these lifestyle differences that equip the socially dominant middle classes with the required attributes and dispositions that fit readily into the institution of the school, which is created and maintained by the middle classes.

3.6. Economic capital

Bourdieu's definition of economic capital relates to a broad range of material resources, for example cash, shares, or property, that are "immediately and directly convertible into money and may be institutionalised in the form of property rights" (Bourdieu, 1986: 242). Other forms of capital may be acquired through the exchange of economic capital, but these generally involve significant efforts or investments of time (Bourdieu, 1986). Economic capital invariably confers power and status and so represents the dominant form of capital in which other forms are anchored (Thomson, 2012).

3.7. Cultural capital

Cultural capital is Bourdieu's most widely known theoretical concept (Reay, 2004). For Bourdieu (1986,1990), cultural capital is comprised of types of field specific formal or informal knowledges that can be used to overcome problems or translated into (and from) other forms of capital as required. Beginning in the home, cultural capital can be unconsciously accumulated without explicit instruction but can also be taught. It can change and be built upon throughout life; however, the influence of early origins is enduring (Bourdieu, 1986: 17).

Bourdieu first arrived at the notion of cultural capital as a way to explain unequal educational achievement between children of differing social classes (Bourdieu, 1986: 17). He noted that children from different classes often obtain different "profits" from schooling and that these are accompanied by the varied distribution of forms of cultural capital between the classes. He argues that functionalist perspectives towards education and educational outcomes are overly focussed on economic investment and return, neglecting the substantial role of cultural capital in academic achievement (Bourdieu, 1986: 17). Bourdieu then, provides an alternative to views that positioned lower educational attainment among the poor as ineptitude.

Pertinent to this study, Lo (2015) and Lamont and Lareau (1988) argue that when the empirical works of Bourdieu are examined, cultural capital is almost exclusively operationalised as the possession of skills and knowledge connected to high-status cultural capital, and the ways in which it reproduces and legitimises the social standing of the elite. Dalal (2016: 234) argues however that Bourdieu intentionally kept his theoretical concepts "loose" so that they could be applied to a broad range of inquiry, as "thinking tools" rather than prescriptive, unyielding structures. This flexibility means that Bourdieu's concepts are adaptive and adaptable both in meaning, and application. I adopt this perspective, and the view that in a similar way all population groups have a habitus, all groups possess cultural capital. What differentiates them is the forms of cultural capital and the weight or value given to them in specific settings or fields. This means that there are culturally preferred or dominant forms of cultural capital, and that these reflect a familiarity with 'high culture'.

Subsequently, the cultural capitals of the non-dominant classes are often overlooked. As noted by Lo (2015), resistance functions as a common form of cultural currency of the dominated. Resistance is often enacted through withdrawal, or apparent passivity.

Complicating this, people inhabiting the cultural elite may choose to “activate their cultural capital resources” in ways not traditionally viewed as legitimate ‘high culture’ (Friedman, 2011, 10). For example, Friedman (2011) observes that British Comedy has a history of being viewed as “lowbrow art *par excellence*” (1). However in recent years, British Comedy has become a legitimate field of consumption for people from higher socioeconomic backgrounds.

Whilst there may be some increased ‘blurriness’ in what constitutes legitimate forms of cultural consumption, it seems likely that this flexibility is not experienced in an egalitarian fashion. Whilst those of higher social positioning are able to ‘come down’ to partake in a diverse consumption of cultural products, it is arguably more difficult for those occupying lower status social positions to ‘flex up’ to consume higher brow cultural offerings.

Bourdieu distinguishes between three elements of cultural capital; embodied institutionalised, and objectified (Bourdieu, 1986; Oncini and Guetto, 2017). *Embodied capital* encompasses the outward expression of cultural tastes and knowledge or dispositions of mind and body. The embodied state of cultural capital is the most central, as “most of the properties of cultural capital can be deduced from the fact that, in its fundamental state, it is linked to the body and presupposes embodiment” (Bourdieu, 1986, 244). Bourdieu (1989: 17) contends that embodied cultural capital is fundamentally inscribed and experienced in the body through a lengthy and sacrificial “labour of inculcation”. This work is done in the name of ‘self- improvement’ by the actor, and “...like the acquisition of a muscular physique...it cannot be done at second hand...” (Bourdieu 1989: 18).

The institutionalised state represents educational credentials, professional organisational memberships, titles, or other symbolic designations granted by social institutions. The attainment of institutionalised capital usually requires a significant investment of time and effort. Bourdieu (1988: 20-21) describes an academic qualification as “a certificate of cultural competence” which bestows its holder with a recognised value. This value may be

leveraged to obtain a particular quotient of economic capital, and subsequently supports the accumulation of other capitals.

Objectified cultural capital relates to the possession of cultural goods which convey symbolic meaning, for example, works of art, musical instruments, monuments, or media. Owing to its material form, objectified capital is transferrable between actors (Bourdieu, 1986: 19). Bourdieu observed however (1986: 19), that while ownership of objectified capital is transmissible, consumption of cultural goods necessitates requisite embodied capital which as noted above, is not transferrable. Regardless of the form, cultural capital is predominantly transmitted to children through their family of origin (Reay, 2004).

3.8. Social capital

Bourdieu's theory of social capital provides another theoretical lens with which to consider data in this study. Bourdieu understands social capital as the cumulative resources available to actors from *outside* the family, and as resources that are connected to a "network of more or less institutionalised relationships" (Bourdieu, 1986: 248). Bourdieu (1986) first introduced his concept of social capital in 1986. Whilst there are other well-known theories of social capital (see for example Coleman (1988), and Putnam (2000)) in literature relating to social capital and educational success, a significant proportion of research is founded in the work of Bourdieu (Dika and Singh, 2002; Rogosic and Baranovic, 2016). Social relationships or group memberships including family, friends, sporting affiliations, or other networks, are forms of social capital (Rogosic and Baranovic, 2016). Overall, the traditions of Coleman (1988) (and also Putnam (2000)) present social capital as a shared, community asset. As this study focuses on the experiences of parents engaging with schools and school related groups, Bourdieu's social capital is most applicable. Bourdieu views social capital on an individual level that encompasses actor's networks and social relationships that confer benefits. These connections can result in the accumulation of emotional or material resources that individuals can utilise to their benefit (Bourdieu, 1986; Rogosic and Baranovic, 2016). Social relationships can be leveraged for the attainment of specific goals (Rogosic and Baranovic, 2016). Social capital then, is a helpful resource for individuals who may be able to use it to ameliorate, at least to a degree, the effects of low economic

resources. Importantly, Bourdieu argues that social capital is the result of sustained efforts to “...produce and reproduce lasting, useful relationships that can secure material or symbolic profits” (Bourdieu, 1986: 22). Subsequently, social capital is not presupposed or permanent but rather, is contingent on actors’ investments in social labour. For parents in this study for example, this may be through activities such as forming and maintaining social relationships with teachers, other parents, and key community members through services such as LiL.

3.9. Field

Emerging in Bourdieu’s later writings is the concept of field (Navarro, 2006). Bourdieu saw field as a theoretical lens through which social and cultural action could be examined (Fitzpatrick and Burrows, 2017). Field represents the environment or space in which habitus is enacted. The social field is a system of social positions with specific distribution of particular forms of capital. Each field has a ‘taken- for- granted structure’, its own workings or ‘logic of practice’ (Fitzpatrick and Burrows, 2017; Jenkins, 2002). Field then, is “a social arena within which struggles, or manoeuvres take place over specific resources or stakes and access to them” (Jenkins, 1992: 84). Bourdieu (1998: 40) describes field as “...a structured social space, a field of forces...It contains people who dominate and people who are dominated...”. As a site of domination then, field is characterised by a struggle between individual, groups, or institutions for access to, and control of finite resources and status (Bonello et al., 2018; Jenkins, 1992; Navarro, 2006). Society more broadly is understood as a social space containing infinite interrelated fields (Jenkins, 1992: 87). Tensions and alliances can arise not only within, but between fields as members grapple for status and power. Schools represent fields, where struggles for power can occur between actors. Parents bring and enact their habituses in the school field, and these can be very different habituses than those of school leaders and teachers, who are on their ‘home turf’. This creates potential for power struggles and tensions between (and within) parents and teachers.

3.10. Symbolic violence

Like much of Bourdieu’s work, the concept of symbolic violence (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977) formed during his examinations of the French education system. Symbolic violence may be understood as

...the way in which people play a role in reproducing their own subordination through the gradual internalisation and acceptance of those ideas and structures that tend to subordinate them. It is an act of violence precisely because it leads to the constraint and subordination of individuals, but it is also symbolic in the sense that this is achieved indirectly and without overt and explicit acts of force or coercion (Connolly and Healy, 2004: 15).

Bourdieu argued that educational systems promote and impart the abilities and understandings of the dominant classes - a discrete set of social values, attributes, and systems of meaning that shape the ways that individuals interpret and engage with the social world (Dalal, 1992). These are in turn mis-constructed as intellectual ability, thereby legitimising successful students and problematising students who do not possess the dominant capitals (Beckman et al., 2018; Bourdieu 1984).

For Bourdieu, all pedagogic action is value laden and imbued with cultural meaning, or the 'cultural arbitrary' (Jenkins, 1992: 105). He argues that culture or cultural attributes and practices are mistakenly (or arbitrarily) self-legitimised and understood as natural or appropriate with little consideration of pedagogic and ideological underpinnings. Bourdieu argues that education therefore is not a neutral apparatus offering working class emancipation. Rather, it is responsible for producing, and reproducing deeply ingrained social inequality (Bonello et al., 2018, Jenkins, 1992). This is achieved through the imposition of "systems of symbolism or meaning" (Jenkins, 1992: 104) upon less dominant groups. This imposition generates the experience of 'symbolic violence' (Wacquant, 2006). For Bourdieu, symbolic violence is enacted through culture in a way that is 'misrecognised' as legitimate. The assumption of legitimacy disguises the power relations that facilitate the enforcement of these systems (Jenkins, 1992: 104). Misrecognition perpetuates social domination by producing the submission.

For Bourdieu (1977: 5) "all pedagogic action is symbolic violence insofar as it is the imposition of a cultural arbitrary by an arbitrary power". Interestingly, his use of "insofar" seems to imply that he believes there are forms of pedagogy that do not enact symbolic violence; that is, pedagogies that do not impose the cultural arbitrary, or use arbitrary powers to enact such pedagogies. Symbolic violence therefore, represents a key mechanism for the reproduction of social inequalities and refers to the ways that actors may inadvertently participate in their own delegitimation and subordination (Connolly and

Healy, 2004). Bourdieu uses the word *symbolic* to indicate that actors are subordinated through tacit means. *Violence* refers to the way in which such tacit or indirect acts, lead to institutional control (Connolly and Healy, 2004). Bourdieu's concept of symbolic violence attempts to account for working-class experiences without resorting to the dichotomy freedom/determinism debates that Bourdieu so fervently opposed. Consideration of symbolic violence then is important, because it can shape the lived experiences of students and their families in ways that have lasting effects.

Schools and teachers can unintentionally enact symbolic violence upon students who are from non-dominant classes in such a way that the culture of the dominant group is self-legitimised, and imposed upon subordinate social groups (Schubert, 2012). Through this process, students whose homes are rich in the dominant capitals more readily adapt to the demands of school life and are therefore advantaged. Conversely, students are more likely to encounter disadvantage in schooling if they do not come from a home that is rich in the same, preferred kinds of capital (Beckman et al., 2018; Watkins, 2018). Moreover, students from backgrounds that do not have rich resources of dominant forms of cultural capital who do achieve 'success' in school may feel the need to shun or disown aspects of themselves and their families that are not seen favourably in educational institutions (Maslin, 2016). This conception of capital highlights that some capitals are given more social recognition or 'currency', than others. This is important as it allows for the recognition of 'other', non-dominant capitals that are often held in working class, or less economically advantaged, populations.

3.11. Foucault and Bourdieu

The Bacchian document analysis used in this thesis stems from the work of Foucault. Bacchi's (2009) What's the Problem Represented to Be (WPR) analysis is informed by Foucault's ideas of governmentality, discourse and power (Beutler and Fenech, 2018: 19). Most pertinent to this study, Bourdieu like Foucault, is interested in power and how power shapes what is possible and taken as 'truth'. Foucault argues that these assumed truths take the form of discourses or "practices that systematically form the objects in which they speak; they do not identify objects, they constitute them and in the practice of doing so conceal their own invention" (Foucault, 1972: 49). This view is compatible with the work of Bourdieu. Notably for this thesis, Foucault's discourse compliments Bourdieu's symbolic

violence (Wachs and Chase, 2013) in that it highlights the arbitrariness of assumed truths and the power that accompanies those inhabiting socially dominant institutions, such as schools. Wachs and Chase (2013) argue that combining Foucauldian perspectives of discourse with Bourdieu's symbolic violence elucidates a more nuanced understanding of "how truth claims infiltrate the day-to-day practices on individuals" (113). This is particularly relevant for this study which is interested in the ways that information about early childhood education is represented to parents.

3.12. Critiques of Bourdieu

The most widely offered critique of Bourdieu's concepts is that they are inclined to be deterministic and imply that individuals lack agency (Beckman et al., 2018; Jenkins, 1992). In particular, Bourdieu's perspective on education has been criticised as being cynical, and of perpetuating a view that the education system leaves no room for change or resistance (for examples see Connell, 1983; Jenkins, 1982; Sulkunen, 1982; and Zanten, 2005). In response to such accusations, Bourdieu has argued that his critics have adopted a simplistic and superficial reading of his work, focussing on the titles of his books, rather than their content. He argues further that any system of domination necessarily implies resistance and "...the dominated, in any social universe, can always exert a certain force, inasmuch as to belong to a field means by definition that one is capable of producing effects in it" (Wacquant, 1989: 36). Jenkins (1992) argues further that theorists who accuse Bourdieu's work of determinism may be guilty of examining his concepts in isolation, particularly the constructs of habitus and capitals. A nuanced understanding of Bourdieu's work therefore requires holistic consideration of his theory of practice (Beckman et al., 2018).

Habitus has received particular critique as being deterministic (for example see Mellor and Shilling (2014a). Bourdieu, according to Jenkins (1992: 78) however, does not view actors as being irretrievably trapped into particular ways of acting because of their histories; rather "habitus disposes actors to do certain things" (Jenkins, 1992: 78). Moreover, Bourdieu argues transformation of habitus is possible "...by the effect of social trajectory leading to conditions of living different ones..." (Bourdieu, 1990a: 116). Jenkins (1992) argues further that in his later work, Bourdieu (2000: 83-83) describes habitus as "...a system of lasting, transposable dispositions which, integrating past experiences, functions at every moment as

a matrix of perceptions, appreciations, and actions” such that Bourdieu’s use of the word “transposable” indicates that habitus “has a certain plasticity” (Hoy, 2004: 106) and can adapt, and improvise under changing conditions (Hoy, 2004: 107). In short, habitus is durable, but not immutable. Relevant to this study, this view recognises that in the education field, habitus is influenceable, and can be strengthened by teachers in ways that might support families’ transitions into the schooling. Subsequently, education professionals have an important role in socialising children by instilling (either unconsciously or consciously) particular cultural codes or ways of being (Bonello et al., 2018).

A further critique of habitus is in relation to its relevance in a fluid social world. Mellor and Shilling (2014a: 277) suggest that habitus has limited utility in the contemporary social life that is characterised by reduced social stability, growing socio-cultural complexity, and more dynamic and “reflexive engagements with change” (275). They suggest that the intergenerational reproduction of habitus is not a straightforward process in contemporary times where young people have more opportunities for social and geographic mobility and amongst “...a profusion of competing signs and symbols...” and available lifestyles (Mellor and Shilling, 2014b: 130). This complexity may therefore produce an ongoing process of “creative” habitus adaption and change. Whilst they acknowledge that Bourdieu incorporates reflexivity into habitus, Mellor and Shilling suggest that this operates on a superficial level, rather than being a meaningful activity, and that contemporary sociologists who use Bourdieusian concepts often “engage with his writings selectively”, avoiding his “reductionist view[s]” (277). Accusations of selectivity then, are used to both critique and defend the work of Bourdieu. Related to this, and as noted earlier, Dalal (2016: 234) purports that Bourdieu intentionally kept his theoretical concepts “loose” so that they could be applied to a broad range of inquiry, as “thinking tools” rather than prescriptive, unyielding structures. This interpretation of Bourdieu’s work is consistent with his overarching goal to bridge the objectivism/subjectivism divide. This looseness means that Bourdieu’s concepts are adaptive and adaptable both in meaning, and application. Subsequently, habitus and Bourdieu’s other concepts, can be interpreted in ways that remain pertinent to contemporary social life. It is this view that I take in this study.

Education focussed work, produced by Bourdieu and Passeron, has been viewed by some as radical. Zanten (2005) notes that their work has been accused of overlooking that schools

have contributed to the 'success' and class emancipation of many working class people. This is addressed by Bourdieu and Passeron (1970) who argue that the observable 'upgrading' or social mobility of a relatively small number of working class students, is built into the educational system. This mechanism, Bourdieu argues, helps to ensure social stability, and longevity of the educational device, thereby preserving its own reproduction and dominance. Moreover, those students experiencing disadvantage who have achieved academic success, have often done so despite a lack of family resources and support through deep struggle 'against the odds' (Reay et al., 2009: 5). Moreover, for Bourdieu (1999: 340):

... pedagogical action can ... because of and despite the symbolic violence it entails, open the possibility of an emancipation founded on awareness and knowledge of the conditionings undergone and on the imposition of new conditionings designed durably to counter their effects.

In relation to symbolic violence, Watkins (2018) argues that the concept obscures that there are elements of education that are not arbitrary. For Watkins (and others, for example Nash and Lauder (2010) and Maton (2000)) education is not simply a vehicle for domination and inculcation of class values, but rather, that "there is knowledge that transcends class boundaries pertinent to understanding the world and to effective engagement within it". Watkins (and also Bernstein (1990)) argues for the existence of knowledge that has inherent value. What is important for this thesis, is that I use the use the concept of symbolic violence to highlight 'unintended consequences' or pitfalls of particular policies, approaches, or ways of engaging with families. Understanding these pitfalls creates opportunities to overcome them and create services that maximise the benefits for parents and their children.

3.13. Contemporary application of Bourdieu in education.

Whilst Bourdieu's perspectives on education were formed chiefly by his own experiences growing up in the French education system, his arguments can be usefully applied to contemporary Western school systems, as well as other systems of social reproduction (Grenfell, 2014; Jenkins, 1992). Bourdieu's theories are used widely in sociology of education research and are useful in bringing attention to the structures that maintain

inequality. In exposing ways that inequality is maintained, it becomes possible to begin a process of re-structuring institutions to create more opportunities for those who have been traditionally disadvantaged in the education system. For example, in an examination of the Australian Government's My School website (ACARA, 2010), Mills (2015) applied Bourdieu's concepts of cultural capital, field, and symbolic violence. My School publicises individual school's performances on the compulsory numeracy and literacy tests, NAPLAN. Mills brings attention to the ways that My School can function to reinforce disadvantage and legitimise systems that favour the cultural practices of dominant social classes. Subsequently, the cultural capital of students living with disadvantage is delegitimised. Differences in NAPLAN success and educational achievement between students from advantaged and disadvantaged backgrounds is subsequently 'misrecognised' as individual aptitude. Mills argues however, that such differences reflect the ways that children from dominant classes enter their schooling pre-equipped with the forms of cultural capital that will promote their educational success. Mills' analysis emphasises ways that lower academic achievement observed among lower SES students can be oversimplified or wrongly attributed to lack of ability. Additionally, Mills rejects critiques of Bourdieu as deterministic. She supports Bourdieu's own view (1996b) that through exposing misrecognition, there is potential to redesign the learning field in ways that create greater egalitarianism (Mills, 2015).

Bourdieu's concepts of cultural and economic capital were used by Oncini and Guetto (2017) to examine social patterning of food consumption and differences in Italian school children's food choices. Consistent with previous studies, they observed that students of higher social positioning (in this study, those with greater levels of economic and dominant cultural capitals) tended to eat more nutritious foods, including larger quantities of fruit and vegetables. Whilst children with lower levels of the dominant forms of capital were more likely to consume lower cost, more filling and energy-dense food. This is significant, as it is well established in the literature that dietary consumption patterns produce long-term health and learning effects, which may operate to further influence and reinforce social positioning. This study therefore, emphasises the ways that capitals interact to influence lifestyle and social positioning through family preferences and practices (Oncini and Guetto, 2017). By adopting a Bourdieusian lens, the researchers were able to garner new understandings of mechanisms of social disadvantage.

Bourdieu's concept of habitus was utilised by Clarkin-Phillips (2018) to explore the involvement of parents living in a socioeconomically disadvantaged New Zealand community, with their children at Kindergarten. Families in the sample were often unfamiliar with school environments and the services that were available to them for their children. Subsequently, families entering the Kindergarten experienced a disparity between the primary habitus and the field. The study found that classroom teachers can successfully use explicit pedagogy and informal, respectful relationships to build upon families' existing habitus to facilitate the development of a 'secondary habitus'. Clarkin-Phillips argue that this adaptive, secondary habitus helps to smooth children and parents' transitions between home and the educational setting. This study demonstrates the potential for habitus plasticity, highlighting Bourdieu's work as a useful tool for the development of more egalitarian services and institutions.

Also relevant to this study, Mills and Gale (2004) apply a Bourdieusian lens to their examination of parents' participation in children's schooling in a highly welfare dependent Australian community. They utilised several of Bourdieu's key concepts, field in particular. They argue that field enables them to examine the effects of relative social positioning and structural constraints on parental engagement in schooling. For Mills and Gale, this approach gives voice to more marginalised parents who are traditionally excluded in the design of school practices. For example, low parental engagement in children's schooling is often understood as low interest or care (Lareau, 1989; Mills and Gale, 2004). Bourdieu however, emphasises that "interest is a precondition of the functioning of every field" (Mills and Gale, 2004: 270), and as such, parents have demonstrated their interest and valuing of schooling. Field underlines a further barrier; "the legitimate is never made fully explicit. If the marginalised do not know the rules of the game, how then can they fully know the moves that permit them to win?" (273). The use of Bourdieu therefore, enabled Mills and Gale to reject a 'deficit view' and present alternative explanations for parents' low engagement in children's education. For example, barriers to engagement such as feelings of inadequacy, lack of experience in school settings, and subsequent deference to 'expert' teachers were highlighted. Habitus enabled consideration of what changes could be made to the classroom to "make it so they feel comfortable" (275), shifting the responsibility

(blame) from parents experiencing disadvantage, to the powerful and socially dominant institution of the school.

Andrew and Fane (2019) draw upon Bourdieu's ideas to inform aspects of their sociological exploration of Australian early childhood education. In particular, they focus on the ways that educational structures contribute to the maintenance of social inequality through symbolic violence (Andrew and Fane, 2019). They use habitus to explain the feeling of unease or being a 'fish out of water' experienced by many families living with disadvantage and social marginalisation (49). Based on Bourdieu's concept of capitals they develop the idea of emotional capital to explore the ways that early childhood educators engage in managing their own emotions, and the emotions of others in the educational environment.

More broadly, Alanen et al. (2015) uses Bourdieusian concepts of field, habitus and capital to evaluate the social status of childhood and children's rights. This is achieved through the evaluation of social institutions and agencies over time to understand how childhood is understood.

3.14. Chapter conclusion

This chapter has provided an overview of the theoretical concepts of Pierre Bourdieu and explained the relevance of his work to this study. Bourdieu's interrelated key concepts of habitus, field, and capitals were outlined. Additionally, the Bourdieusian concept of symbolic violence, and the ways that this is applied to this study was also discussed.

Habitus will be used in this thesis to understand how families experience and understand early childhood education through the LiL program. Field helps to highlight the differing social positions and rules of engagement between participants at sites. Bourdieu's concepts of capitals demonstrate the various forms of assets that families have and can utilise to acquire a range of benefits. Finally, symbolic violence helps inform an understanding of the potential for unintended consequences and challenges for service providers and systems to consider when engaging with families, designing early childhood education programs and policy. Whilst these concepts have been subject to critique as discussed, they provide a useful lens for understanding how schools, teachers and families interact in school environments.

The strength of Bourdieu's tools in this study is that they emphasise the differing ways that the education and schooling system are understood, and they highlight potential mechanisms that underpin the diversity of experiences in a single shared environment. This is particularly suited to this study which considers the perspectives of families and teachers who interact in the classroom setting.

Document analysis and ethnographic techniques were used to address the research questions. The following chapter, Chapter Four, will detail the methods and methodology utilised for this study.

Chapter 4: Methodology and Methods

4.1. Introduction

This chapter details the research methodology, and the qualitative methods that I used to address the research questions guiding this study:

1. How does the Tasmanian Government describe and position LiL, and what are the problems that this service seeks to address?
2. How are families using LiL?
3. What are the key factors that shape families' use of and engagement with LiL?
4. How do families and service providers understand the purposes of LiL, and do they share the same understandings?

To address these research questions, I have developed a qualitative methodology and utilised multiple qualitative methods. This approach allowed me to generate a rich body of findings that considers the provision of LiL and early childhood education from multiple perspectives. This use of multiple qualitative methods is compatible with Bourdieu, who warns against “mono-maniacs” stating that:

We must try, in every case, to mobilize all the techniques that are relevant and practically usable, given the definition of the object and the practical conditions of data collection (Bourdieu and Waquant, 1992: 226-227).

Supporting this, Denzin notes that in its earliest uses, triangulation referred to the application of multiple forms of qualitative methods (Denzin, 2012). This approach has been the source of disagreement amongst some scholars who contend that multiple methods research is flawed, due to unsolvable differences between paradigms. However, I take the view proffered by Denzin (2012). Denzin (2012: 82) notes that the application of a variety of methods highlights a recognition that objective reality cannot be captured. This approach brings an implicit acknowledgment that triangulation does not seek to create validation, but rather presents an alternative, that brings “...rigor, breadth, complexity, richness and depth to any inquiry” (Denzin 2012: 82).

There were two distinct phases in the study. The first is an analysis of policy documents and parent brochures related to early years education, LiL and Kindergarten. The document

analysis utilised two approaches, the first is the 'What's the Problem Represented to be' (WPR) approach developed by Carol Bacchi (Bacchi, 2009) as a tool for the analysis of policy and government documents. Bacchian WPR document analysis enabled me to uncover the perceived social problems that early childhood education programs such as LiL seek to respond to. I then undertook a thematic analysis of parent information brochures in order to identify key messages directed to parents from Tasmanian DoE schools in relation to early childhood, and early childhood education.

The second major phase in the study was a fieldwork study of parents use of LiL, and to a lesser extent kindergarten. As part of this phase I interviewed parents, teachers and other service providers working in LiL and Kindergarten and spent time in both settings as a participant observer. Using the ethnographic techniques of semi-structured interviews, informal interviews, and participant observation enabled me to explore the lived experiences of teachers and parents.

This chapter is structured as follows. Firstly, I outline the methodology and methods used to analyse policy documents and parent brochures in Phase One of the study. Next, I describe Phase Two, the fieldwork study in detail and justify this approach.

Then information about the research sites and services is provided. Next, ethical considerations are detailed, followed by an explanation of how I accessed service sites and participants. Family and service providers details are then presented.

Finally, the methods used to collect, analyse and present the fieldwork data are detailed, along with a discussion regarding ethical considerations in this study.

4.2. Epistemology and ontology

Ethnography can be conducted from a range of epistemological positions (Guba and Lincoln, 1994; Whitehead, 2004). For example, social researchers have conducted post-positivist ethnographies (common in anthropology), critical ethnographies, and feminist ethnographies. I chose to conduct this ethnographic work from within a social constructionist perspective. Social constructivism emerged from the interpretivist worldview through works such as Berger and Luckmann's (1966) *The Social Construction of*

Reality (Cresswell, 2014). Social constructivism focuses on the processes of interaction and meaning making within the contexts in which actors live and work (Cresswell, 2014). I view this as a strength of social constructivism that supported my aims to understand the experiences of families and service providers. A further strength of the constructionist approach is its recognition that the values and perspectives of the researcher are deeply, and unavoidably, connected to the generation and interpretation of research findings (Cohen and Crabtree, 2006). In constructionist paradigms, reality and truth are not viewed as objective, clearly delineated social facts. In contrast, “‘realities’ are jointly constructed at given points in time by the ethnographer in conjunction with the people being studied” (Whitehead, 2004: 21). This notion of multiple realities is key to social constructionism and recognises the ways that different groups of people construct differing and situationally dependent realities (Cohen and Crabtree, 2006). Ideas of ‘truth’ are seen as the product of shared understandings and agreement among groups, rather than an objective reality (Patton, 2015). This transparency locates the researcher as part of the process itself, which is a central aspect of this research project that involves close work with informants through fieldwork and provides a useful way to consider the data in this project.

The constructionist perspective emerges from an ontological relativity in which reality is viewed as an assemblage of subjective interpretations and meanings. As a result, the experience of reality is not homogenous, but rather:

...all tenable statements about existence depend on a worldview, and no worldview is uniquely determined by empirical or sense data about the world. Hence, two people can live in the same empirical world...one’s world is haunted by demons, the others’ by subatomic particles (Patton, 2015: 122).

Recognising these diverse experiences of reality provides a way to understand and interpret the varied perspectives and perceptions that can emerge from within a single service environment. In this study, applying the filter of social construction allowed me to consider the subjective (but objectively felt and lived) experiences of research participants. Families and service providers often held distinctly different social positioning, power, and constructed realities, yet in the context of early childhood education services, they interacted in the same social sphere. Additionally, when social problems are viewed from a constructionist perspective, it can be understood that what can be constructed, can also be

re-constructed. Re-construction is a way forward, to address social problems, and support the principles of social justice that underpin this study.

4.3. Phase one: Document analysis

Document analyses were conducted to provide some context and insight into the ways that political and discursive approaches foreground Tasmanian early childhood education.

As noted by Silverman (2013: 276-281) document analysis provides valuable background material for a broader analysis, and as a means of understanding the general functioning of social institutions (Silverman, 2013). In common with all qualitative methodologies, there is a risk of bias in the interpretation of documents, and their meanings. By providing a careful description of the analysis process, I have sought to minimise this risk. Given that documents are produced for specific, non-research purposes, document analysis may not provide enough detail or nuance as a stand-alone qualitative method (Bowen, 2009). However, as part of a suite of methods, it helps to strengthen a study. As a constructionist researcher, I am less interested in documents as forms of hard 'truth', and more focussed on them as artefacts which convey reality constructions (Silverman, 2013: 276).

Document analysis was used to examine two government policy documents, *Belonging, Being and Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia* (EYLF) (DET, 2009), and the *Guide to Reading and Using Tasmania's Strategy for Children - Pregnancy to Eight years 2018-2021* (the Strategy) (DoE, 2017c). The EYLF expresses national learning goals and shapes the curriculum and assessment in early childhood education for every Australian child from birth to five years (DET, 2009). The Strategy provides an overview of the aims and practices that guide all early childhood service providers in Tasmania (DoE, 2017c). These analyses use the 'What's the Problem Represented to be' (WPR) approach (Bacchi, 2012b). The aim of these analyses was to gain a broad understanding of the values, justifications and approaches that shape early childhood education service provision in Tasmania, and to uncover 'problem representations' (Bacchi, 2012b). Policies are the foundation of services. They provide frameworks through which services are both enabled and constrained. Policy informs how early childhood services and educators understand their roles and connect with children and their families (McMahon et al., 2000). Policies are important therefore in shaping how families experience services, making an examination of these pertinent to the goals of this thesis.

A further document analysis examined seven information brochures produced by the Tasmanian Department of Education (DoE). These documents convey information to parents about early childhood education and schooling. This section uses a form of thematic analysis, as described by Ezzy (2002). The aim of this analysis was to identify the key messages and value representations that are conveyed by the Tasmanian Government to families through the documents. The analysis is examined further using the theoretical lens of Bourdieu.

The overarching aim of the document analyses was to identify the views and ‘problem representations’ (Bacchi, 2012a) that inform education policy in Tasmania, and consider how the goals and expectations of the government are conveyed to families through the examined thematically brochures. This matters, because the way that policy issues are understood can give rise to considerably different approaches, courses of action, and outcomes (McMahon et al., 2000: 68).

4.4. Document analysis methods

My examination of the EYLF and the Guide was guided by the ‘What’s the Problem Represented to be’ (WPR) approach. The WPR approach was developed by Carol Bacchi (Bacchi, 2009) as a tool for the analysis of policy and government documents. WPR guides analysis through six questions:

1. What is the ‘problem’ (for example unemployment, drug abuse, climate change) represented to be in a policy or document?
2. What are the presuppositions or assumptions that underpin this representation of the ‘problem’?
3. How has the representation of the ‘problem’ come about?
4. What is left unproblematic or silenced in the problem representation? Are there alternative ways that the issue can be understood?
5. What effects are produced by the representation of the ‘problem’?
6. How or where has the representation of the ‘problem’ been produced, disseminated and defended? How could it be questioned or disrupted? (Bacchi, 2012a: 21).

Bacchi (2009, xxi) comments that WPR analysis can be carried out in a systematic way, applying every question to the material for analysis; or that analysis may take a “a more

integrated form” which gives the researcher freedom to use only the questions deemed most applicable to the inquiry, and to report findings in a similarly integrated way (Beutler and Fenech, 2018). It is the latter approach that is utilised in my analysis of the documents *Belonging, Being and Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia* (EYLF) (DET, 2009), and *Tasmania’s Strategy for Children- Pregnancy to Eight years 2018-2021* (the Strategy) (DoE, 2017c). My examination of the EYLF is focussed on the first sections (pages 1-23) which outline the aims of the strategy. The latter part of the EYLF details the five Learning Outcomes, which I briefly outline early in the analysis.

Applying a Bacchian lens makes it possible to identify how some social ‘problems’ receive the attention (or lack of attention) that they do, what meanings and logics are associated with particular ‘problems’, and what forms of knowledge are enacted to create and justify policy approaches and concerns (Bacchi, 2012a: 22). WPR stems from the work of Foucault’s (1972) poststructural analysis of governance and focusses on identifying ways that policy acts to *construct* ‘problems’ and taken-for-granted ‘truths’. These can be politicised through policy agendas and governance to variously shape the lives of individuals (Bacchi, 2012b; Bletsas, 2012). The WPR approach involves a ‘reading backwards’ from solutions offered in policy, to identify how ‘problems’ are represented and constructed, enabling a better understanding of the relationships between problems and policy (Bletsas, 2012). This is not to suggest that social problems do not objectively exist, but to shed light on how they are understood, and to open possibilities for alternative ways of seeing them. In this study, the identification of underlying social issues such as disparities in educational outcomes for example, is not intended to imply that these are not objective social issues. This is well established and is not contentious. Rather, I aim to understand what issues are guiding the design and delivery of the examined interventions and policies. This is an important consideration, as discourses are linked with power and understandings of ‘truth’ and possible avenues for action (Foucault 1972). Additionally, this process endeavours to uncover the possible explanations of educational disparity that shape government policies.

4.5. Parent information brochures

During the fieldwork phase, numerous documents that related to early childhood education were collected from sites visited. Documents were primarily information brochures and were usually located in school/CFC reception or entry areas, and inside classrooms, play spaces or other prominent areas. Some brochures contained information that was specific to the sites at which they were collected; LiL timetables, or excursion information for example. Seven non site-specific information pamphlets produced by the DoE Marketing Services and collected during the fieldwork period were selected for this analysis using purposive sampling. These were titled:

- Kinder Ready
- Launching into Learning
- Child and Family Centres
- Get Involved in Your Child's Education
- Ready to Start School Checklist
- Starting Kindergarten

Purposive sampling allows the researcher to identify cases based on whether or not they represent the phenomenon or feature/s under examination (Silverman, 2013). In this study then, cases selected were produced by the DoE, appeared to be directed towards families with young children, and related to early childhood education. These brochures form part of a series of documents, designed to provide parents with general information relating to education, that addressed a range of topics; for example, health, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, school starting and finishing ages.

Parent documents were analysed using thematic analysis, guided by Ezzy (2002). These documents were not included in the Bacchian WPR analysis, as they are not overt policy documents, and were less 'problem' focussed. Ezzy (2002: 83) describes the inductive, thematic analysis method as a 'bottom up' technique in which categories "emerge from the data" and are not predefined. This approach was chosen because as Ezzy (2002: 85) argues, thematic analysis allows the data to "speak". This is mainly attributable to the fact that whilst the areas of interest or relevance to the research are predetermined, the specific themes are not (Ezzy, 2002: 88), which suited the aims of this analysis. Thematic analysis

involved immersive line-by-line reading and re-reading, note taking, open coding and axial coding (Ezzy, 2002). A final round of theory-led analysis applied Bourdieusian concepts to the examination (Edwards, 2010).

4.6. Phase two: Field work study

4.6.1. Ethnography

The fieldwork aspects of this study were conducted within a social constructionist ethnographic approach. Throughout my research I employed a range of ethnographically informed techniques and research practices from within a constructionist epistemology. This approach recognises the researcher as an instrument and co-constructor of sociological inquiry (Lofland et al., 2006). Ethnographic methods have been extensively utilised to examine diverse sociological issues in early childhood education (for examples see Kameniar et al. (2010); Lynch and Redpath (2014); Millei and Cliff (2014); Niland (2015); Taylor (2010); Theobald et al. (2015)), and some have applied a social constructionist lens (for example, see Bollig and Kelle (2013), Wilson (2014)). Contemporary ethnography takes multiple forms (Rashid et al., 2015) and can be understood as both a methodology and set of techniques, or “a process and an outcome” (Pellatt, 2003: 29) which does not have a prevailing definition (Pellatt, 2003).

Regardless of definition, at its most pure, ethnography is characterised by an attitude that both explicitly and implicitly affirms:

I want to understand the world from your point of view. I want to know what you know in the way you know it. I want to understand the meaning of your experience, to walk in your shoes, to feel things as you feel them, to explain things as you explain them. Will you become my teacher and help me understand? (Spradley, 1979: 34)

Ethnography first emerged in anthropology during the late 19th Century and was further developed and refined for use in sociological exploration in the Chicago School in the early 20th Century (Apter et al., 2009; Rashid et al., 2015). The term ‘ethnography’ arose from ancient Greek in which ‘ethnos’ refers to ‘folks’ and ‘graphe’ means ‘written representation’ (Jaynes et al., 2009; Rashid et al., 2015). Relevant to this study, ethnography is widely utilised throughout social science and education disciplines and is well suited to capturing the voices and views of ‘ordinary people’ (Apter et al., 2009). While ethnographic approaches vary, they share a number of characteristics (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995).

Broadly speaking, ethnography involves the intensive observation of small numbers of participants within a specified setting or their daily environments (Buchbinder et al., 2006: 48; Mukherji and Albon, 2010: 69-70). Researchers act not only as observers, but also as active participants (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995; Lofland et al., 2006). Ethnographic research tends to be understood by the techniques used in ethnographic studies: most commonly fieldwork, longitudinal interviewing, informal interviewing, and participant observation. A key task of ethnographic exploration is to become 'immersed' in the study site through fieldwork. Fieldwork is *doing* ethnography (Agar, 1980). It is important however, to recognise that the minutiae of fieldwork, and the terminology used to denote its workings can be a "terminological jungle" (Lofland et al., 2006: 5) that is characterised by conceptual disagreement and the absence of a concise term to encapsulate the work. Therefore, the specific scope and techniques used in this project will be explained in detail.

For early ethnographic researchers, achieving immersion in the field required inhabiting the site over a lengthy time frame (Whitehead, 2004). For contemporary ethnographers however, complete immersion is often prohibitive or deemed undesirable. Regardless, spending extended periods of time in the research setting remains a vital feature of ethnographic investigations (Whitehead, 2004). Earlier forms of ethnography often focussed on traditional cultural practices, whilst contemporary ethnography is adept at examining emerging themes and practices (Rashid et al., 2015). The contemporary ethnographer may gather any available data to illuminate the social issues they explore, rendering the boundaries of ethnographic explorations "necessarily unclear" (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995: 2). These blurred edges of ethnography reflect the embeddedness of the researcher in the social field, they are a part of the environment they wish to understand, and it is this embeddedness that facilitates their exploration of it. Ethnographers seek to acquire as much detail as possible, viewing the complexities and intricacies of issues as more valuable than being able to make generalisations (Mukherji and Albon, 2010: 70).

Understanding culture is a central goal of ethnography (Patton, 2015). In its broadest sense, "...the term 'culture' can refer to ethnic groups, a geographical location, professional groups, other groups and organisations" (Hansen, 2006: 61). It is this expansive definition of

culture that is applied throughout this project. The guiding assumption of ethnographic endeavours is that groups of people, who interact over an extended period, develop a discrete culture. Bourdieu's early work in Algeria was ethnographic, and this work formed the theoretical basis on much of his later work (Silverstein and Goodman, 2009). Bourdieu posits that the experiences of groups through shared habitus invariably results in the development of unique subsets of cultures that profoundly influence the way that people operate within society. This in turn influences the lived experiences of those actors, and shapes their 'realities' (Bourdieu, 1987). This study considers how both family, and service provider culture impacts upon what services and service approaches are best suited to different populations. Ethnographic techniques are well suited to early childhood research across multiple sociocultural contexts (Mukherji and Albon, 2010: 69) and support the interpretation of "social interactions and meaning making" (Buchbinder et al., 2006: 48). Human behaviours reflect diverse social meanings that can only be understood through apprehension of their contextual cues (Geertz, 1973). Ethnography can provide a means of seeing "...the familiar with fresh eyes" (Hansen, 2006: 61), and considers the place-based knowledges and practices of groups as forms of expertise (Lambert and McKeivitt, 2002). This assumption locates informants and their experiences at the centre of the enquiry, seeking to understand social practices from this perspective, rather than problematising or 'othering'. A participant focussed approach allows the voices of informants to be heard and legitimises the experiences of those who are often marginalised. This forms an important aspect of this research that seeks to uncover how early childhood services are subjectively felt and experienced by the families who use them. Ethnography offers researchers the benefit of both an emic and etic (insider and outsider) perspectives (Whitehead, 2004). The emic viewpoint considers elements of the cultural system from the *position of the group under study* and enables the researcher to understand and become deeply familiar with the realm of the informant (Whitehead, 2004). This is the central goal of the ethnographic enterprise (Apter et al., 2009) and relates to the research questions in this project which seeks to understand the ways that families experience and understand early childhood services and what these services *mean* for them.

Conversely, the etic approach examines cultural systems with research paradigms from outside the system (Whitehead, 2004). The etic view accounts for the fact that people's lives

unfold within larger systems that are often outside their immediate awareness and control. For example, the early childhood education supports available to Tasmanian parents have emerged from a complex and often unseen policy and service system that is not readily accessible to consumers, yet this system can have powerful effects on their lives. Moreover, the etic view attempts to contextualise and understand that culture is not always easily defined and that:

...the attributes of culture include dichotomies such as the ideal versus the real and the tacit versus the explicit, [so] the ethnographer must maintain some sense of an external, "objective" framework (Whitehead, 2004: 16)

The etic/emic dual view helps researchers to articulate the lived experiences of the group under examination, and to embed findings within their cultural context and background, producing a more rigorous study.

A further consideration in ethnographic work is the relationship of the investigator to the research setting. Davis (1973) describes two positions investigators may assume in the field as the 'Martian' or the 'Convert'. The Martian researcher attempts to apprehend the field as a stranger, unencumbered by their own cultural assumptions and constructs. This position enables the researcher to problematise aspects of the social setting, and therefore study them from a more clinical and distant vantage point. The researcher who comes to a setting as an outsider with little or no experience of that environment, more naturally enters as a Martian (Davis, 1973). Conversely, the Convert investigator may already be a member of the field, or someone who feels drawn towards full immersion in the setting, wishing to belong to it in order to know and understand its subtleties (Davis, 1973; Lofland et al., 2006: 22). Both of these positions have ethical and pragmatic strengths and weaknesses, however, "the sensitive investigator wishes not to be one or the other but to be *both* or *either* as the research demands" (Lofland et al., 2006: 22) (original emphasis). This flexible positioning was particularly applicable in this study, which aimed to understand the experiences of those who are consumers of Government early childhood education services (families) and to a lesser extent, those who work within services (service providers). Services invariably operate within a broader system of service provision and cultural expectations and families bring their own experiences and cultural perspectives into the service environment.

4.7. Background to the research in this study: River Town and Distant Hills

River Town² and Distant Hills were selected as primary research sites in consultation with Tasmanian Government partners and the Community Reference Group as part of the broader Tassie Kids project. Site selection considered birth rates, socioeconomic disadvantage, service use and results on the Australian Early Development Census (AEDC), the presence or absence of a CFC, researcher logistics, and involvement from Government partners. The Index of Relative Socioeconomic Disadvantage (IRSD) uses economic and social data to rank communities' socioeconomic disadvantage on a scale from 1-10 where 1 = high disadvantage, and 10 = low disadvantage (ABS, 2016b). Both sites are amongst the most disadvantaged communities in Australia, with IRSD scores of 1.

Site One, River Town is a suburban area of Northern Tasmania. River Town has a small population of just over 1000, and the adjacent suburbs are home to approximately 13,000 residents (ABS, 2016a). River Town is situated on the fringes of a major urban centre. Early childhood programs are offered at a community centre, and LiL is run at the government primary school. LiL is also available at another government primary school on the outer edge of River Town.

Site Two, Distant Hills, is a rural region located in Southern Tasmania, with just over 10,000 residents (ABS, 2016a). There is a main township with a population of over 5000, and several smaller towns surrounding. There are two government schools and a CFC located in the main township, and another three government schools in the neighbouring towns. LiL is run at the schools and a range of other services and activities for families with young children are offered at the CFC.

To assist with participant anonymity, additional ethnographic data was collected from two supplementary CFC sites. One CFC was in a town with a population of over 18,000, and the other with a population of approximately 2000 people. Both towns were ranked in the lowest two deciles of socioeconomic disadvantage on the IRSD (ABS, 2016b). Most data were collected by two primary researchers, of whom I was one. Primary researchers were each embedded within one of the two sites and visited the other sites to gain familiarity of

² All place names and schools have been given pseudonyms.

both. The primary researchers were both part of the broader Tassie Kids study, and all ethnographic data collected in the study was shared within the project team. Researchers also visited a range of community activities, meetings with Government and non-government stakeholders, and network meetings. A third researcher joined the Tassie Kids project later in the data collection and visited both primary sites. Over 100 days were spent collecting data from primary research sites. The analysis undertaken and reported on in this thesis was conducted only by me. All fieldnotes used in this thesis are my own.

Table 3 presents demographic information for River Town and Distant Hills, along with state and national level data for comparison.

Table 3: Research Site Demographic Information

Source: ABS Census Data, 2016

	River Town	Distant Hills	Tasmania	Australia
Total population (N)	1081	10, 021	509,965	23,401,892
Median age (Y)	34	43	42	38
People per household (N)	2.3	2.4	2.3	2.6
Single parent households (%)	47.2 (F86.4) (M13.6)	18.4 (F78.8) (212.2)	17.4 (F80.6) (M19.4)	15.8 (F81.8) (M18.2)
Av Children per household (for families with children) (%)	1.9	1.8	1.8	1.8
Highest educational attainment- Year 10 (%)	29.2	22.7	17.4	10.8
Unemployment (%)	26.4	8.4	7.0	6.9
Zero motor vehicles per household (%)	16.4	7.5	6.9	7.5
Median weekly household income (\$)	627	998	1100	1438
Median weekly rent (\$)	180	210	230	335
Residents renting private dwelling (%)	68.4	24.5	27.3	30.9

When compared with National and State level data, both sites have an above average number of children who are considered “developmentally at risk” and “developmentally vulnerable” on the Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) (AEDC, 2015). Commencing in 2009, the AEDC collects national data to measure the “developmental health and wellbeing” of children in their first year of full-time schooling (AEDC, 2017). The AEDC evaluates development across five domains that relate to children’s long term educational, social and health outcomes, describing “developmentally at risk” children to be those who receive a score that falls between the 10th and 25th percentile of the national population

(AEDC, 2017). There is sound evidence that high quality early intervention services can make a positive, and long term difference to children living with disadvantage. Such services have the capacity to improve the lives and outcomes of children by promoting social inclusion, parental engagement with children and services, and building trust between families and service providers (see for example Morrison et al. (2017), Moss et al. (2015)). Early childhood services have the capacity to deliver the most benefits to children and families when they are responsive, accessible, and designed to meet needs of their community (ABS, 2011; DHHS, 2003).

4.8. Early childhood services in Tasmania

The main universal early childhood education services in Tasmania are Kindergarten, LiL, and Child and Family Centres (CFCs). LiL and Kindergarten are provided in all Tasmanian Government primary schools. Additional services are provided through 12 CFCs throughout the State. These services are described in Chapter One. Whilst this thesis focusses primarily on LiL and the experiences of families in relation to LiL, participants were accessed through Kindergartens and CFCs as well as LiL sites. This meant that I could capture the views of a broader range of service users.

As described in Chapter One, LiL is an initiative of the Tasmanian State Government's Department of Education (DoE). LiL aims to support children's learning and the development of school readiness (DoE, 2017b). Based on the Australian Government's Early Years Learning Framework for Australia (EYLF) (DET, 2009), LiL works with parents, families and communities to help prepare children for transition into school (Jose 2020b). Parents or carers attend LiL with their children and are encouraged to join in with play-based learning activities that are facilitated by qualified early childhood teachers. Sessions include music, water awareness, physical activities and excursions (DoE, 2017b). LiL is located within all primary schools, and some CFCs. Families living in the River Town area have access to LiL programs at their local school.

In Tasmania, Kindergartens are part of primary schools and are available to children who are four years of age on January 1 of the school year. Children attend Kindergarten for 15 hours a week on either half days, or full days (DoE, 2017a). Kindergarten is taught by registered teachers who support children through planned learning activities. They are encouraged to

“test out their ideas, ask questions and expand their thinking” (DoE, 2017a) as well as developing their literacy and numeracy skills. Kindergarten is widely thought of as the start of a child’s formal schooling.

Additional services, education, and supports for families are offered at CFCs. In 2009 the Tasmanian Government established 12 CFCs to provide a “single entry point to universal, progressive universal, targeted, and specialist early years services and supports” (Taylor et al., 2015: 23). At CFCs, a range of early childhood and family services operate within the same centre, making family support more accessible, and simplifying transitions between services. River Town does not have a CFC but does meet the CFC site-selection criteria. That is, it is a local government area with higher than state average number and proportion of children under the age of 4 years, high socioeconomic disadvantage, high scores on measures of social and economic exclusion, higher than state averages of sole parents, young parents and Aboriginal families. This means some families living in the Distant Hills region have access to a broader range of services for families with young children.

4.9. Gaining access and participant recruitment

Gaining access to the research field involved an initial period of consultation, rapport building and management with stakeholders. At the commencement of the study, all members of the Tassie Kids research team attended a full meeting of Government stakeholders and partners in the study. The meeting enabled the clarification of the overarching research questions, development of timelines, and strategic planning. The research team continued to meet with key service provider stakeholders throughout the data collection period.

Tassie Kids research team members visited sites and service provider meetings, and gave presentations to explain the context, aims, and purposes of study. I visited community based early childhood events and activities, Neighbourhood/Community Houses and community meetings to develop familiarity with the field, and to build rapport with ‘gatekeepers’, workers and families.

My access to schools and the CFC was initially facilitated through the connections that the Tassie Kids project Chief Investigator had with stakeholders, including Government Deputy Secretaries and other senior Tasmanians Government personnel who were supportive of the study. Their endorsement meant that teachers and principals were also supportive and

willing to provide me entrée. Tassie Kids project leaders sent letters to the relevant school Principals introducing me and the Distant Hills based researcher. Following this consultation and information-sharing phase, I emailed the Principals at the River Town Primary School and neighbouring school, Newfield Primary. The Distant Hills based researcher followed the same procedure. CFC staff were made aware of the study through centre meetings and a presentation from the members of the research team. I met with the Principal at the River Town Primary School, and a senior member of staff at the neighbouring Newfield Primary School. Further appointments were made for meetings with the LiL and Kindergarten teachers, at which my access to sessions was negotiated. River Town Primary School was my main fieldwork site, as the largest number of families from the research area attended this school. Additional fieldwork at Newfield Primary School, and later visits to the Distant Hills CFC site added depth and perspective.

The Principal and early childhood teachers at the River Town school preferred that they approach families about participation in the study. Before families were approached about the study, I spent several weeks visiting LiL sessions at the River Town site, engaging with families informally, building rapport and trust, and becoming a familiar face to families. The staff then liaised with me as they scheduled interview times.

At the Distant Hills site, the other researcher attended LiL at primary schools and engaged informally with families and service providers. She also participated during activities with families and service providers at the CFC before prospective informants were invited to participate in the Tassie Kids study. This process was supported by LiL teachers and CFC staff who assisted in identifying parents/carers for recruitment and discussed the study with families. All Distant Hills interviews occurred at LiL school sites or at the CFC.

During the data collection period I spent three days at the Distant Hills CFC where I engaged with families informally, participated in group activities, and spoke with centre staff. This enabled me to become familiar with the CFC. The Distant Hills based researcher also spent time at the River Town site for familiarisation and some data collection.

4.10. Participants: Families

The study design called for the recruitment of approximately 30 families with one or more children aged between birth and five years, residing in the River Town and surrounding area, and the Distant Hills region of Tasmania. Purposive sampling was used to identify

information rich cases who were relevant to the questions under study (Hansen, 2006). Participants were from varied backgrounds, with differing family structures (for example, a mixture of single and dual-parented households and children of differing ages between birth and five), ages and living arrangements. Reflecting the gendered field of ECEC, most were female. To fully address the research questions, however, the voices of families who not active users of services were also sought. Service providers, parents, teachers and community workers were asked to refer families they knew who were not actively engaged with services. This approach, known as 'snowball sampling', uses the networks of those in the target population and can be helpful in gaining access to 'hard to reach' individuals and groups (Mukherji and Albon, 2010: 197). All prospective informants were given clear information on the study and its aims both in written form as a participant information sheet and verbally by the researcher.

This extensive fieldwork and consultation period resulted in 39 parents/carers ('families') being recruited into the study with 16 from River Town and 15 from Distant Hills and the remaining 8 from the additional sites. Most parents were female (87%) and were living with a partner (69%). Whilst sampling did not purposely seek participants by gender, the sample appeared representative on the proportion of female and male parents/carers present at sites. Families had a median of 2 children, with 19% having one child and 22% having more than three children. Almost all participants (N30) had completed their education at or before Year 12.

Parents were interviewed alone, with the exception of one couple who were interviewed together. One parent was recruited but did not attend the scheduled interview. Twenty-three participants were interviewed twice. Second interviews took place between 20 and 41 weeks following their first interview. Fourteen participants were interviewed once. Two of these were not followed up for second interviews as their circumstances had changed and they were not available for second interviews. In one case the mother attended interview one, and the father attended interview two. Two participants did not attend their scheduled second interviews, and another 8 participants were recruited later in the study which meant that insufficient time had passed to schedule a second interview. In recognition of their time, participants received a \$50 supermarket voucher, for each interview.

Figure 2: Family Participant Educational Attainment

Highest level of education	Participants
Bachelor's degree	2
Year 12 or equivalent	12
Year 11	2
Year 10	16
Year 9	4
Year 8	2
Year 7	1
Total	39

4.11. Participants: Service providers

Whilst my focus was primarily on families, service providers including LiL and Kindergarten teachers were also an important aspect of this research. Further to school principals receiving letters explaining the study, relevant school staff were provided with an information brochure explaining the research project, its key aims and strategies, privacy and their rights not to participate (see Appendix 3). LiL and Kindergarten teachers were then invited to participate in informal and informal interviews.

This process resulted in 32 DoE staff across the two sites being recruited into the study. Participants were 24 early childhood teachers, two teacher's aides and with 6 CFC staff. All teachers held a Bachelor's degree or higher, and the teachers' aides had year 12 or certificate level educational qualifications. CFC staff included a CFC leader, Educational Officer (teacher), Aboriginal Early Years Support Worker, Community Inclusion Worker and CFC Assistant. These staff hold qualifications ranging from year 12 through to post graduate level. All service providers were female.

4.12. Participant observation

Observation and participation allow the researcher to develop rich insights into social and cultural situations, from the unique and 'felt' perspective of those who inhabit those

situations (Hatch, 2002; Lofland et al., 2006). Participant observation can be understood as a method whereby the researcher:

...establishes and sustains a many-sided and situationally appropriate relationship with a human association in its natural setting for the purpose of developing a social scientific understanding of that association (Lofland et al., 2006: 17).

It is this 'many-sided' relationship that allows the researcher to gather information to develop deep insight. Participant observation occurs within the 'natural' community setting, allowing the researcher to gain a better understanding of the diverse perspectives held by group members by observing interactions and events in their usual environment (Mack et al., 2005). Particularly pertinent in the early stages of a study, participant observation can smooth the development of rapport between the researcher and participants (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995: 89) by providing opportunities for informants and potential informants to interact and develop trust in the researcher in more informal or 'normal' social intercourse. Rapport between the researcher and research informant is valuable from both a pragmatic and ethical perspective. Pragmatically, a sound research relationship is conducive to successful and informative interviewing and may result in informants being more candid and open. This relationship enables the researcher to understand more clearly the lived experiences of those under investigation. Good rapport reflects the values of respect and beneficence that underpin ethical sociological inquiry (Israel and Hay, 2006: 36).

In this study, participant observation took place in early education settings throughout the fieldwork period. This involved my observation of, and participation in, activities at centres and making detailed fieldnotes that form an important data source. While engaged in participant observation I also interacted with participants in short informal interviews. Informal interviews were conversational in nature and included questions such as "do you bring your child to LiL every week?", "is this your first child?", and "do you ever visit other early childhood centres?". This approach highlights the adaptability and multiple forms of ethnographic interviewing that can "range from spontaneous, informal conversations in places that are being used for other purposes, to formally arranged meetings in bounded settings" (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995: 139). This flexibility enabled me to take

advantage of interview opportunities as they arose, reflecting and responding to the dynamic social field in which research takes place.

In addition, I attended meetings with early childhood service organisations and service providers. This continued throughout the data collection phase and helped me to understand the policy and cultural environment that influences the activities of the sector. I regarded these meetings as fieldwork, with my detailed notes helping to inform my research and develop valuable relationships within the sector.

4.13. Fieldnotes

Ethnographic researchers aim to develop a nuanced understanding of the lived experiences of participants by keeping “careful, objective notes about what they see” (Mack et al., 2005: 3). I recorded detailed fieldnotes throughout my fieldwork period, as did the Distant Hills based researcher. To ensure that making notes does not disrupt normal activities or make participants feel uncomfortable “...note-taking must be broadly congruent with the social setting under scrutiny” (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995: 177). Subsequently, my fieldnotes were taken on site only when doing so would not appear unusual, for example at a community or professional meeting where it is normal to see attendees taking notes. On occasion, I discretely logged a few words as prompts for my later writing, but most frequently, my observations were recorded immediately after leaving the field. See below excerpts of my fieldnotes, recorded within an hour of leaving a LiL session at River Town:

At LiL this morning were 8 adults (including one family day carer who brought several children, two Dads; one is a regular, one came with his partner). The children were cutting out yellow star shapes and they were being tied together with string to make a small mobile (the song this week is Twinkle Twinkle Little Star, so it fits with the theme). On another table was playdough... I spent some time with a little girl I have seen at LiL on numerous occasions... Last year if I spoke to her, she was too shy to respond. Today she was calling out to me across the room and was very engaged with activities and me. She spent about ten minutes handing me large plastic insects, lizards and dinosaurs and talking about them.

Visited Pre-Kinder today. I arrived at 9.20 am. Classroom very busy! Teacher is [participant]

There were about 15 pre-kindergartners, with their Mums, a couple of Grandmothers and one Dad. There were about 4 or 5 babies /smaller children as well, who were there with their pre-kinder siblings.

[Teacher] opened a small office/storeroom space where I could leave my bag and apologised that it is so crowded...

[Teacher] rattled a large red shaker to signal to the class that she wanted everyone's attention. She then introduced me and told everyone a little bit about why I was there.

The classroom is decorated with bright spring themed art works by the Kinder class who use the room. Each pre-kinder child has their name and photo on a card that is displayed on a small easel next to the teacher's chair. The Kinder rooms share a deck space outside the room where there were activities set up today, because it was a really sunny, warm morning.

[Teacher] told me that the children had been given some 'jobs' to choose from which included painting outside on the table, blocks outside on a large carpet mat, dress ups, colouring, computer activities. Most were engaged with an activity, a few were moving around the room playing with dolls and soft toys etc. Some of the parents were really engaged in activities with their children, some were kept busy caring for younger children, a few sat talking to each other or on their phones. The Dad was very attentive to his son. Teacher told me that this Dad is great with his son and is a very steady influence on him. She commented that the school is working with the Mum who has some difficulties with anxiety.

[Teacher] asked the group to pack away their activities ready for a story. When the room was tidy the children and some parents sat on the mat. [Teacher] instructed a few wiggly children to sit on their bottoms, hands in lap, so that they were "ready to be a listener". She used her body language really strongly to show the children what she wanted. At times throughout the morning, she would say things about Kinder next year and reminded the children that they were practicing for Kinder.

[Teacher] showed the children the series of books she was reading from- all about a bear. The Hungry bear, The Cranky Bear, The Sleepy Bear etc. Today was The Sleepy Bear. The children listened well and enjoyed the story. After, a little girl asked if they could hear another one, and it was decided they could have another one later, before home time.

Next was fruit time. [Teacher] instructed the children to sit on the mat outside, and make a circle, which they did in a surprisingly orderly way. I noticed throughout the session that the children had obviously developed a clear understanding of what was expected and were comfortable with it. The teacher's aide brought out a large plastic platter with pieces of banana, blueberries, orange, apples on it and she moved around the circle offering fruit to each child. One little boy had stayed standing up with his Mum and became grumpy. His Mum said he does not like this part of the session because he does not eat fruit. Another Mum opened a bag of crisps for her toddler to eat.

After fruit, the children were allowed to go outside to play. [Teacher] opened the shed and the children helped themselves to bikes etc. The children played busily for about 20 minutes, and then it was time to pack the bikes away and head back inside for the last story before home.

After the last story, [teacher] handed out paintings from previous weeks and said goodbye. Everyone left. The last child to go was at the door doing a great job of packing up his own backpack and getting himself organised. His Mum had two younger children in a pram and the teacher was full of praise for his independence and ability to do this job for himself.

After everyone was gone, she commented that there are a few anxious parents who are worried about how their children will transition next year. They are worried about separation from their child and that the child will cry. [Teacher] is working with them to reassure them that they will settle quickly and even if they do cry, things will be ok. The TA commented that it is good for parents when the Kinder teacher is experienced and motherly, rather than a fresh graduate.

This was the last session before school holidays, LiL will start again in three weeks.

4.14. Semi-structured interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with families and service providers at LiL, Kindergarten and other community sites throughout the research period. This study uses both longitudinal and one-off interviews to gain insight into the experiences of families and service providers. In this study, longitudinal interviewing refers to the approach of ‘going back’ (Miller, 2014) whereby most family participants were interviewed twice during the data collection phase. Second interviews took place between six and eight months after first interviews. The collection of data over an extended period helped inform my understanding of families use and experiences of services over time (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995; Miller, 2015). A longitudinal perspective is especially relevant to this study, as the needs and experiences of families vary throughout the early years of their child’s life as children grow and develop. An additional benefit of repeat interviewing is that it can help researchers to develop rapport and a continuing research relationship with informants (Miller, 2015: 293), supporting the elucidation of rich and meaningful data. This was particularly so in my research, where participants appeared more relaxed and open in second interviews. This added to the richness of the data collected. Some parents who were identified as “less engaged” or “harder to reach” were only interviewed once due to their less frequent presence at sites. Most teachers were interviewed once but provided rich data through ongoing participant observation and informal interviewing.

All formal interviews in this study used a semi-structured interview approach. Semi-structured (or focussed) interviews ask open-ended questions from a pre-written interview

guide. Most parent interviews lasted between 50-65 minutes. While the interview guide provides a useful framework, the researcher is not obliged to ask every participant the same questions in the same way (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995; Hansen, 2006). Reflecting its association with inductive methodologies, semi-structured interviews may omit items, include additional questions to clarify responses, or explore topics that become pertinent throughout the course of interview (Hansen, 2006: 99). This flexible approach creates an interview environment that is more 'natural' or conversational whilst allowing the researcher to have control over the direction of the dialogue, and to maintain some consistency between interviews (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995: 152). A further benefit is that a semi-structured approach can produce more detailed, nuanced data than a rigid 'tick-in-a-box' interview style (Baum, 2008). For example, when used in longitudinal interviewing, semi-structured interview schedules offer informants the opportunity to give expansive answers or provide background information that can contextualise their response or prompt further questioning.

4.15. Participant data management and analysis

All participant related data including fieldnotes and interview transcripts were stored on a password protected, secure shared drive. To protect participant confidentiality and anonymity, each participant was allocated an alphanumeric code. These codes were used on every data file, so that informants' names, or other identifying details were not associated with their data. Audio-recordings of interviews were professionally transcribed, and transcripts were then compared with recordings to verify their accuracy. Accompanying fieldnotes taken during and after interviews were stored with transcripts. All fieldnotes and transcripts were deidentified before they were imported into NVivo 11 (QSR International 2012).

4.16. Interview coding and analysis process

Using iterative thematic analysis, the analysis of interview transcripts was guided by the research questions and aims. This approach seeks to identify important themes, recurring language or emergent ideas that relate to the research questions (Lofland et al., 2006). Commencing early in the data collection, thematic analysis involved an ongoing and conscious shifting between the collection and analysis of new data, and analysis and deliberation over data already collected (Hansen, 2006; Lofland et al., 2006). This method is

well suited to this research, “where patterns and themes identified in data already collected are used to re-focus or adapt research questions and data collection tools, such as interview guides” (Hansen, 2006: 139). My data collection, reflection and analysis were an ongoing, “back-and-forth movement between the strange and the familiar” (Blanche et al., 2009: 322) that continued throughout the fieldwork and analysis period. During the analysis period both researchers regularly engaged in reflexive discussion, comparison of coding, reviewing of memos to refine the analysis. This ensured consistency between the two researchers interviewing, fieldnote taking and data analysis throughout the study.

To achieve immersion in the data, fieldnotes and interview transcripts were read, and re-read. Immersion leads to deep familiarity with the data and supports the identification of developing themes and sub-themes (Marshall and Rossman, 2006: 158). Reflecting my emphasis on the experiences of families, parents’ interviews and perspectives were the primary focus of my analysis. Teachers and other school staff interviews, as well as fieldnotes and observations were primarily used to clarify or provide context for the ideas that emerged from the family data. Transcripts were checked against audio recordings for accuracy. Transcripts were read and re-read to develop immersion in the data, and to begin the identification of emerging themes (Marshall and Rossman, 2006). During these earliest stages of analysis, I engaged in manual coding using a ‘broad-brush’ (or open coding) technique, looking for patterns or ideas within and between data. This ‘hands-on’ approach to coding helped me to develop a deep familiarity with the transcripts, and the coding procedure. As data collection continued and the quantity of data grew, field notes and transcripts were uploaded from a secure server to NVivo 11 (QSR International). This simplified data management and analysis. The analysis broadly involved a process of data reduction, data display, conclusion drawing, and verification as outlined by Miles and Huberman (1984). These phases, whilst generally lineal, also involved returning to earlier stages for checking and clarity. Analysis was ongoing throughout the data collection period which enabled a reflexive and responsive approach to the interview questions and informal interviewing (Hansen, 2006; Lofland et al., 2006).

In the first round of NVivo data analysis, transcripts from both study sites were coded line-by-line to a broad coding tree to identify general patterns in the data (Ezzy, 2002).

Participant demographic information was collated and summarised using Microsoft Excel

spreadsheets. NVivo allows for the generation of hierarchical coding structures. Early broad-brush coding which creates parent nodes, can subsequently be built upon into more specific child, and grandchild nodes as themes are clarified. Attribute nodes for demographic and broad service-related categories were created in NVivo for Parents/Carers and Service Providers. A pre-established coding structure (compiled by the research team using a group coding approach), formed the starting point for early coding. The predetermined nodes were generic and supported the early sorting of data in relation to broad categories such as service names, research sites, family structure or employment status. Additional nodes were added as analysis progressed.

As the analysis unfolded, secondary level 'child nodes' were established for each parent node and reflected more specific themes that emerged from within the broader parent nodes. Additional parent and child nodes were developed in response to emerging themes and ideas during reading and early coding, reflecting the inductive approach to qualitative data analysis (Patton, 1980: 306) (See Figure 2).

The aim of this initial process was to identify themes that were related to the research questions (Boyatzis, 1998; Ezzy, 2002). This coded data was then further analysed using axial coding (Ezzy, 2002) to uncover emerging themes and subthemes (or child and grandchild nodes). Subsequent analysis used selective coding to reduce data into overarching themes that formed the final results of story (Ezzy, 2002). This stage of analysis was primarily completed using a manual process of examining themes and subthemes on paper, with ongoing note taking and comparison between data. This approach to gathering and coding data allowed me to draw meanings out of significant quantities of raw data, and to identify pertinent issues and concepts (Barker and Thomson, 2015). The Memos feature of NVivo was used to record coding decisions, key concepts, ideas and reflections. An analysis log was also set up in NVivo to record notes and ideas about the analysis process. For example:

Name: Analysis LOG

Description: Notes about new memos and nodes etc

Created On: 25/06/2018 1:27:05 PM

Created By: RPJ

Modified On: 25/06/2018 3:17:58 PM

Modified By: RPJ

Size: 2 KB

25/6/2018

Adding more and more memos and themes emerge- Leaving node structure as is but adding memos to develop key points and emerging themes in data.

Might add new nodes for subsequent round/s of analysis.

*Added **Judgement** as a new memo- but will need to incorporate other refs to this from existing memos- but I think it is emerging as a stand-alone factor.*

*An important point about LiL is that many parents **do not know about LiL with their first child**. They find out about it once that child is at Kinder- so subsequent children are more likely to attend LiL. First children more likely to miss the opportunity.*

*LiL can help address the need to **get out of the house** for parents- especially those experiencing degrees of isolation.*

Some parents feel that LiL gives them a bit of a chance for a break from the demands of their children. This is sometimes at odds with the expectations and goals of teachers.

*Need to start developing the memo re **Isolation** as a specific theme - currently represented across numerous memos due to different causes/ examples.*

Second interviews were significantly guided by the first interviews. Initial questions were used to follow up on identified areas of interest such as parents' concerns about children's development or transition into Kindergarten. This process not only enabled a longitudinal perspective, but also acted as a form of member-checking. Additionally, second interview questions examined ongoing use and engagement with services, the ways that LiL or Kindergarten use may have increased or decreased, and the influences on this. Parents perceptions of school readiness and the role of early childhood services in preparing children for Kindergarten were also explored.

Throughout the process, I met with the other Tassie Kids qualitative researcher to discuss and reflect on the interview process and emergent findings. Subsequently, some of the codes used in my analysis were created by the other investigator as themes were generally consistent between the two primary Tassie Kids research sites.

Following the initial round of NVivo coding, patterns in the data were examined more closely in a second round of analysis using NVivo *Memos*. Second interviews were coded to the same set of parent nodes as first interviews, with additional child nodes introduced to

reflect new, more 'granular' information or themes. Interview items that pertained to school readiness were based on the domains of the AEDC (AEDC, 2017). The five AEDC measures are physical health and wellbeing, social competence, emotional maturity, school-based language and cognitive skills, and communications and general knowledge.

Initially focussing on data from the River Town site, the second phase of analysis interrogated developing themes which were given headings in the *Memos* function of NViVO. These were connected to specific examples of themes from transcripts using NViVO *See Also Links*. This process created 18 themes for further examination (see Figure 3). For example, a Memo titled 'Getting out of the House' was created in response to recurrent comments from participants about the ways that LiL provided opportunities for parents to leave their home for a few hours and to socialise with other parents.

Figure 3: NVivo coding tree with parent node for 'Parenting', and 'Parenting' child nodes

ParentsCarers			
Name	Sources	References	
Parenting	28	97	
Challenges	26	47	
Dads experience	23	57	
Gender	19	33	
Isolation	21	63	
Joys	27	32	
knowledge	6	6	
Previous Experience	4	5	
Role	19	37	
Skills	11	18	
Support	30	175	
People mentioned	8	9	
Pregnancy	3	4	
Service use	24	77	
Services	29	216	
Time	0	0	

Data from the Distant Hills site were then analysed in *NVivo Memos*, using a constant comparison approach (Grbich, 1998) to identify similarities between the data, and to explore any pertinent differences between the research sites. Further, and ongoing reading of transcripts was undertaken to check for context and interpretation accuracy.

Figure 4: Example of NVivo memos in analysis for concept of 'Relationships'

Relationships - connection to s

Participant [] talks about moving house to the other side of town, but planning to remain connected ET LiL because of the connection she and the children have made to the LiL group and teacher. This is in spite of transport difficulties that will be heightened by the greater distance. See also fieldnotes.

Participant [061] also talks about a carer at the children's childcare centre- 'school nana'- these bonds are important to children and parents

LiL teacher talks about building relationships and the work this takes. She mentions that this has resulted in increased attendance at LiL. She adds too that flexibility is part of this. These positive relationships mean that issues can be addressed. See [034] for lots on building relationships and ways she does this.

Note: Highlighted areas connect to NVivo "See also links".

A third round of analysis led to the 18 themes being compressed into three key thematic concepts: 'Isolation', 'Complex lives' and 'Features of services'. This process involved careful examination of the 18 themes to determine whether they could be reduced to a smaller number of final overarching themes. For example, the second-round analysis memo, 'Relationship building in schools', was merged into 'Features of services'. The memos 'Lack of transport' and 'Getting out of the house' were incorporated into the concept of 'Isolation'. The initial emergence and notation made in this process can be seen below and on page 81, with the example of 'Isolation':

*Need to start developing the memo re **Isolation** as a specific theme - currently represented across numerous memos due to different causes/ examples.*

'Poverty', 'Family problems', and 'Health issues', were merged into the 'Complex lives' heading. In addition, Bourdieu's concept of 'Capitals' formed overarching theoretical concepts connecting to all three major themes. Capitals were explained in Chapter Three. Whilst other themes were noted, they were related to the major headings above or, they were eliminated due to infrequency of occurrence, or lack of relevance to the guiding research questions and aims. Fieldnotes (which included notes taken after interviews) were not coded, but rather used as tools for reflexivity and reference. Fieldnotes were read and re-read throughout data collection and analysis to maintain interpretive clarity on context, school processes, roles, families and in particular, participant families' engagement with services and service providers.

This analysis procedure involved an ongoing and reflexive process of meaning making that is inherent in all iterative data analysis (Patton, 2015; Srivastava and Hopwood, 2009). As noted by Srivastava and Hopwood (2009: 77) this "...reflexive iteration is at the heart of visiting and revisiting the data and connecting them with emerging insights, progressively leading to refined focus and understandings". To this end, separate reflexive notes and journaling were also undertaken throughout the fieldwork period. Miles and Huberman (1984: 10-12) note that this analysis process supports a reconfiguration and condensing of data into a manageable and ordered form that can be utilised to respond to the specific research questions. The key themes 'Isolation', 'Complex lives', and 'Features of services' that emerged from this process are detailed in Chapter 6: Ethnographic Results. Vignettes

were compiled for each thematic area to illustrate themes in a way that reflects participants' lived experiences. The pseudonyms in each vignette represent a hypothetical research participant. However, direct quotes from study participants are used throughout each vignette to highlight recurrent issues and themes in the data.

In addition to making fieldnotes, I also engaged in reflective journaling (Ortlipp, 2008). Occasionally fieldwork was stressful. I sometimes heard stories from teachers and parents that were difficult. Journaling helped me to manage this. I also debriefed with the other main researcher. Below are two excerpts from my reflective journaling that demonstrate the process I used to manage my own feelings and experiences.

13/04/2018 - River Town

Visited a community event for families on Thursday. When I arrived, I saw [participant], who looked very flat. When I asked her how she was, she became visibly distressed and started to cry. She told me that her daughter was having an unsupervised access visit with her father today. When I last spoke with [participant] access visits were taking place at a family centre and were supervised [due to ongoing issues] ...but this has changed...I felt sad seeing [participant] distraught and wished I was able to help her, but I understand there is almost nothing I can do. What I did do was to listen to her for a while and then give her a hug...I spoke to the community worker- I know [participant] has a sound relationship with her. I told her that I was concerned for [participant] and asked her to keep an eye on things...After spending the afternoon thinking quite a lot about the situation, I decided to arrange a debrief call with KJ.

6/6/18 - River Town

Two days visiting [sites] with [researcher]. Am physically and mentally drained.

[Other researcher] was taken back by what she saw and learned at the sites...and the complex home situations that some of the children live in... She expressed shock and sadness. At first, I was taken aback by these things too. It seems like there are some things I'm now almost becoming "used to" hearing about.

I have recently found myself wondering if things were always this way and I just had not noticed. I have thought a lot about when my children were small- did I see these issues at their school? Or were these issues not present at their school? Did I just not notice because I was busy parenting my own little people?

Reflective journaling was a valuable process that helped me to 'debrief'. Additionally, journaling facilitated the reflexive examination of my own values and approaches to parenting.

4.17. Vignettes

As this research involved long term, often close engagement with research participants, I wanted to share their stories in ways that captured their lived experiences and reflected how the broader context of their lives influenced their use of LiL. Supporting this goal, vignettes are incorporated into the reporting of key findings from the ethnographic arm of the study. Vignettes present findings in a "narrative based mode" (Reay et al., 2019: 207) that helped to convey the hardships and barriers to LiL engagement that parents often faced. This was important, as families who do not engage with services are often constructed as problematic (McDonald, 2010). I therefore considered it an ethical obligation to embed findings in their context. Using the words and stories of participants to do this seemed not only logical, but an important way for the richness of voices to be heard. Reporting findings through vignettes can be approached in several ways, and in this thesis are amalgams of direct quotes, participant observation, and interview data to form single stories that each connect to a major theme through stories and characters (Abdallah, 2017). Reay et al. (2019: 208) note that this approach to reporting has the disadvantage of "reducing the universe of data which authors are able to showcase; in a way, it reflects the trade-off between depth and breadth". Subsequently, vignettes are used to give overviews of findings that are embedded within more detailed discussions and examples of results.

4.18. Reflexivity

Reflexivity is an aspect of qualitative research that is deeply embedded in ethnographic techniques, forming not just a means of addressing sociocultural differences, but a key task of the work itself (Patton, 2015). It is worth noting that 'how to be reflexive' is a contentious argument in the social sciences (Reed, 2017). Regardless, broadly accepted characteristics of reflexivity do exist, and are summarised by Atkinson (1990: 7):

the notion of reflexivity recognises that texts do not simply and transparently report an independent reality. Rather, the texts themselves are implicated in the work of reality construction...there is no possibility of a neutral text

Reflexivity is an explicit acknowledgment that the interpretation of observation is influenced by the subjective cultural, paradigmatic and personal framework that researchers bring into the field, and that these may influence the research process (Patton, 2015; Whitehead, 2004). Reflexivity maximises the interpretive validity of this study (Altheide and Johnson, 1994: 486) by accounting for "... the ways in which the self affects both research process and outcomes" (Pellatt, 2003: 30). This process bolsters the rigour of the research and makes the results more transparent. A reflective practice I employ in this work, is to explain in detail how I arrived at my interpretations of the data. Rather than simply defending my work from critique, these explanations can facilitate further dialogue and interpretation of the data (Reed, 2017: 110). My deep involvement in the ethnographic work can therefore be understood not as a weakness, but a strength of the technique (Coffey, 1999). Pellatt (2003) agrees, arguing that the intimacy of the researcher with the researched is only a weakness if a researcher neglects to "...critically engage with the range of possibilities of position, place and identity" (Pellatt, 2003: 31). From a Bourdieusian perspective, this approach "turns methods of constructing the research object back on themselves so as to produce more accurate understanding of the social world" (Fries, 2009: 326). This critical engagement with diverse possibilities helps to expose biases, to control and limit them, and to locate the research and its findings in its broader social context.

4.19. Limitations of qualitative methodologies

My ambition to understand participants' lived experiences informed the decision to use qualitative research methods. Qualitative methods facilitate the exploration of context, culture and meaning. A strong attribute of qualitative research is "...an interest in subjectivity and the authenticity of human experience" (Silverman, 2013: 6). This exploration of subjectivity was essential in achieving the objectives of this study. This process creates a space in which the voices of participants can be heard. As with all research techniques however, qualitative methodologies have limitations, and all social science research is invariably characterised by a "fundamental symmetry problem" that is humans studying humans (Reed, 2017: 109). As a result, researchers invariably bring to their investigations their own set of beliefs, experiences and biases. This is not necessarily a limitation in itself; indeed, researchers often develop intellectual curiosity about particular fields of study due to their own related experiences (Lofland et al., 2006: 10). For the sake of

research integrity however, my social positioning must be acknowledged (Marshall and Rossman, 2006).

I am a cisgender, married, white, middle class woman and mother, and I recognise that these factors have shaped my life and influence the lens through which I view the world and subjectively interpret my surroundings and experiences. My research is informed by my commitment to the importance of social justice and the rights of families and children to achieve the highest possible levels of wellbeing. I also believe that education offers a pathway to opportunities and personal development, and that it can be an emancipatory process and tool for many. Further, my views and approach are shaped and informed by my family of origin, my employment history, training, and education that I have received, and I acknowledge that my ideas are shaped by my position of relative privilege. My own experiences of the education system have generally been positive. This may be attributed to my social position and background that have imbued me with the requisite skills and values that enable successful negotiation of middle-to-upper class social institutions. This background underpins my interest in this research and my desire to contribute to an early childhood education system that supports and contributes to a more egalitarian community. My positionality has inevitably influenced my findings and leaning towards a social justice perspective, as it is the lens through which my research was shaped, and my findings were formed.

Qualitative research techniques such as interviewing which forms a significant data collection method in this study, can be understood as “...a creative and interactive process whereby the interviewer and the interviewee participate in a joint construction of events and interpretations” (Hansen, 2006: 97). This joint construction is problematic for critics of qualitative research who argue that the findings of studies are at risk of being merely a representation the researcher’s individual interpretations of their observations in the field, rather than objective social facts (Altheide and Johnson, 1994; Fusch et al., 2017). This is a relevant point; however, this research project does not make explicit comment on social facts, but rather, highlights the lived experiences of its participants. Regardless, I addressed this potential risk by engaging in journaling and reflexive practice, as well as reflective listening throughout the research process. For example, I used reflective listening to check that I correctly understood what I heard from informants by using statements like “it sounds

like you are saying that when you come here you feel...". This approach gives informants the opportunity to add further detail or correct any points I may have misunderstood. Reflective listening helps to empower participants by giving them the opportunity to correct and add to my interpretations. Moreover, it assists the process of meaningful engagement with participants by creating a way to listen to them that implicitly recognises them as "whole people, not as mere instruments on which to conduct research" (Miller, 2013: 828).

In this research, the use of participant observation allows me to go beyond being a silent observer, to share in the activities and events that take place in the research setting. This practice helps me to 'step outside' my usual social position. For example, during fieldwork visits I helped children with craft activities, and washed dishes for the teacher, read books to toddlers and held a crying baby while her mother prepared a bottle. This helps me to understand events from the informants' perspective and reduces othering by repositioning me as an active participant. Indeed, Lofland et al. (2006: 13) argue that fieldwork *demands* that researchers become involved participants in the social space they seek to understand. Regardless, the differences between cultures can never be fully comprehended by an outsider, "there is always a surplus of difference that remains when attempting to explain or interpret another cultural subject" (Grant and Luxford, 2009: 21) and this must be acknowledged with ongoing reflexivity. This embodied approach to social research provides opportunities to gather rich, up close data that could not be captured through more impersonal means.

4.20. Limitations of social construction

Social constructs represent the meanings ascribed to various objects or events by a group or population (Andrews, 2012). A weakness of this approach is that whilst a construct may be understood as an objective, natural 'truth' or 'reality' in one context, it may be irrelevant when applied to another. This does not present a significant weakness in this research however, as my aim was to understand the lived experiences of those people or groups of people under study, not to draw conclusions that can be generalised to a wider population. This goal is congruent with the view of Geertz (1973:23) that "social actions are comments on more than themselves...Small facts speak to large issues". Critiques of social construction extend to its use in ethnographic research. For Reddy et al. (1997: 329), social construction is problematic because... "there is no limit to the extent to which

personal feelings are socially, locally, culturally constructed”. This view presents social construction as a borderless and ill-defined, and therefore highly subjective concept that fails to give research an adequate theoretical backbone. It is possible to extend this argument of subjectivity to all qualitative research. However, social scientific work, especially that informed by social construction, does not aim to present incontestable inscriptions of truth, but rather, interpretative constructions that should always be regarded as such (Geertz, 2005). This does not render sociological texts ineffectual, but rather relocates them as representations of truth that can be subjected to increasingly deeper interpretation to facilitate a greater understanding of a given subject matter (Geertz, 2005). This view is also applicable to the social constructionist document analysis conducted in this study. Constructionist document analysis should not be viewed as “transparent representations of organisational routines, [or] decision making processes...”, but rather as representations that arise from the application of specified conventions and approaches (Atkinson and Coffey, 2004: 58).

Connected to the previous point, a further critique of social constructionism is that it is ‘anti-realist’ and avoidant of objective realities (Andrews, 2012). Bury (1986: 137) makes this argument, suggesting that the social constructionist approach fails to account for “stable realities” and that it ignores rationality. I acknowledge this potential pitfall of the constructionist position. Whilst I employ a broadly social constructionist perspective in this research, this is not to the exclusion of alternative ways of understanding the data. My perspective aligns with that of Andrews (2012: 40) who argues social constructionism is not incompatible with realism in that “...one can believe that concepts are constructed rather than discovered yet maintain that they correspond to something real in the world”. For example, whilst looking at the experiences of families through the lens of social constructionism, I remain cognisant that these connect to the real (and empirically demonstrated) impacts of poverty and social inequality. This view is compatible with Berger and Luckmann (1966), Hammersley (1992), and Andrews (2012) whose works make the same acknowledgment. Moreover, and pertinent to this study, the enactment of discourse shapes social reality and understandings of ‘truth’ and ways of acting (Foucault 1972).

4.21. Ethics

Ethics approval was granted by the Human Research Ethics Committee (Tasmania) Network (EC00337) (Reference No. H0016203) following submission of a National Ethics Application Form (NEAF). As this study deals with families and children, it is considered a higher risk study and so warranted a National Application. This project has been approved by the Tasmanian Health and Medical Research Ethics Committee (H0016203) and the Social Sciences Human Research Ethics Committee (H0016195).

All potential participants were given an information sheet explaining the study and their rights and protections as informants. Additionally, these details were explained verbally, and opportunities were provided for potential participants to ask questions or seek clarification. This approach helped ensure that consent was informed and provided for the possibility of low literacy amongst some participants. Consent was obtained from each participant prior to formal interviewing. I ensured ongoing consent by checking with participants on a regular basis. Additionally, service providers prominently displayed a plain language poster (see Appendix 8) informing families that the school was participating in an ongoing research project and that researcher/s may be present in the classroom and on site. When I visited sites, I made myself identifiable as a Tassie Kids visitor by wearing identification and a Tassie Kids name badge.

Common to all research strategies, ethnography has known ethical risks that can be confronting and problematic. Ethnographic research involves long periods of time in the field, experiencing, observing and being part of activities with participants. This is described by Arnould (1998: 73) as “... research up close and personal with all the messy emotional implications this entails”. Inevitably, this proximity gives rise to ethical difficulties and questions. Prior to the commencement of my fieldwork, I identified one area as a potential ethical risk. Throughout the fieldwork period, I worked closely with parents and young children. This necessitated that I engage in “emotion work” (Hochschild, 1983). As a mother, I needed to suspend my own maternal nature, and ways of doing things. Importantly, it was necessary to ensure that I did not develop or encourage feelings of attachment to the children or parents with whom I engaged, who at times were living in challenging circumstances. Paradoxically, my social location as a mother helped legitimise my position in the field, facilitating rapport and trust with research participants. These countervailing

appeals exert a "...rather uneasy combination of involvement and detachment" (Fox, 2004; 4; Lofland et al., 2006) that required ongoing management. Despite this potential for friction however, ethnographic study remains "...the best method we have for exploring the complexities of human cultures, so it will have to do" (Fox, 2004: 4). I remained cognisant of this ethical pitfall throughout the fieldwork period, and attended to it and other ethical challenges, by debriefing with my supervisory team, journaling and self-reflection.

Connected to the risk of role conflict is the possibility of "going native". Going native refers to the problem for ethnographers of becoming too deeply involved or overly sympathetic with the researched community. This threatens the researcher's ability to be objective and operate with professional distance (O'Reilly, 2009). Giving rise to role conflict, this risk is implicit in the ongoing and close work of ethnography, encapsulated by van Maanen (1978) who describes the researcher as "part spy, part voyeur, part fan, part member" (345). This challenge extends to another ethical issue in ethnography, which is, exiting the field.

Severing the research relationship at the end of a project can be accompanied by several difficulties and the degree to which leaving the field is complicated depends on the reasons why disengagement becomes necessary. There are multiple factors that can precede a decision to leave the field. For example, completion of the research, loss of funding, or ethical issues related to personal safety or professionalism (Lofland et al., 2006). My reason for leaving the field was the planned completion of the research. However, the intended disengagement was still somewhat emotional. One senior teacher thanked me in front of parents and teachers and credited my work and presence with beginning some important new conversations in the school. Another teacher wanted to connect with me socially. Two parents stopped me in shops and asked me why I didn't visit LiL anymore. These experiences elicited degrees of sadness and guilt. Lofland et al. (2016: 30) describes these feelings as an "ethical hangover" and a common experience for ethnographers. Managing these ethical risks was difficult as it "involves peering into an unknowable future" (Lofland et al., 2006: 30). Regardless, in considering and pre-empting these possibilities, I was better positioned to respond to them.

An important consideration in the choice of research methods for this study was issues of power, and power inequality (Lofland et al., 2006). People who are considered to be affected by low socioeconomic status are frequently subjects of research (Clark, 2008). Their

social location is often deemed problematic, and something that is 'other' than desirable or 'normal'. This means that the position of researcher, as well as service provider (who are likely to come from the more dominant social groups) is constructed as more powerful, or of higher status than the researched actor (Grant and Luxford, 2009). The result of this process is that the culture and dispositions of dominant groups often remain unchallenged, which inevitably leads to 'othering'. When othering occurs, actors are systematically categorised on the basis of particular criteria, promoting the proliferation of homogenised ways of thinking about particular, non-dominant groups (Grant and Luxford, 2009: 220).

Ethnographers therefore, must continually consider how their own culture and social position influences their interpretation and presentation of the research data (Marshall and Rossman, 2006).

4.22. Chapter conclusion

This chapter presented the research methodology developed for this study, described the settings and participants, the research methods used and how the analysis was performed. The use of a range of qualitative methods described in this research presents opportunities for different forms of thinking and analysis. This approach helps bolster cogency (Delamont and Atkinson, 2021) and reduces the described potential pitfalls of being "up close and personal" (Arnould, 1998: 73). The next chapter (Chapter 5) will present results and discussion of the document analysis.

Chapter 5: Document Analysis

5.1. Introduction

This chapter is divided into two main parts. The first part is an analysis of two key early childhood education policy documents, and the second part is an analysis of seven Tasmanian DoE parent information brochures.

As detailed in Chapter Four, document analysis was undertaken in this study to provide background context and to uncover some of the ideas that guide current approaches to early childhood education in Tasmania. Whilst they do not (and cannot) address every factor that influences early childhood education practices and outcomes, these documents represent snapshots in time that build upon earlier strategies to set and reset aspirational goals for early childhood education in Australia.

5.2. Part One, Policy Document Analysis

The policy documents *Belonging, Being, and Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia* (EYLF) (DET, 2009), and the *Guide to Reading and Using Tasmania's Strategy for Children - Pregnancy to Eight years 2018-2021* (the Strategy) (DoE, 2017c) were chosen for this analysis. Both are important documents that guide early childhood education delivery in Tasmania. The EYLF was developed by the Australian Government Department of Education and is the first national educational learning framework for young children in Australia. It is used by early childhood educators and underpins all early childhood education and care in the Australian before school sector (birth-5 years).

Policy documents were analysed using the "What's the problem Represented to be" (WPR) approach (Bacchi, 2009). As discussed earlier, WPR uncovers the meanings and logics that are associated with social 'problems', and what knowledges are drawn upon to create and justify policies (Bacchi, 2012a: 22). This is achieved by a process of 'reading backwards' that is guided by the six questions (see Chapter Four) to uncover how 'problems' are portrayed (Bletsas, 2012).

5.3. Analysis of policy documents

5.3.1. Belonging, Being and Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia (EYLF)

My analysis of the EYLF primarily examines pages 1-23 where the aims of the strategy are provided. Learning Outcomes are addressed in the latter part of the EYLF, which I briefly discuss.

There are several overlapping ‘problems’ evident in the EYLF. The introduction of the document provides a strong overview of these. The broad issue expressed is a lack of educational and social achievement in the birth to five years age group. This is evident in the expressed aim of the EYLF: “The aim of this document is to extend and enrich children’s learning from birth to five years and through transition to school” (5). This statement reveals that there is a concern with an inadequacy in children’s learning, and that there are concerns regarding the ‘transition’³ phase. This is further evidenced in the following: “...this Framework [is] to assist educators to provide young children with opportunities to maximise their potential and develop a foundation for future success in learning” (5). The expressed problem then, is that young children do not receive the necessary opportunities to fully realise their ‘potential’ and that they are lacking a ‘foundation’ on which to obtain ‘success in learning’. Further problems are identifiable (5):

... the Framework supports [the goals that]:

All young Australians become:

- *Successful learners*
- *Confident and creative individuals*
- *Active and Informed citizens*

Reading ‘backwards’ (Bletsas, 2012), what seems implicit in these goals is that there are concerns about children being unsuccessful learners, and without intervention will grow into citizens who are inactive and uninformed, which is a further problem. This point seems to connect to the idea that “active” citizens are economically productive, although this is not elaborated. Regardless, it is evident that desirable citizens have particular characteristics.

³ Transition is generally understood to be the period during which children move from the home environment into schooling. In the EYLF it is defined as “the process of moving between home and childhood setting, between a range of different early childhood setting to full-time school” (EYLF: 49).

What is contained in these goals then, might mean that children who are not able to attain the status of being a 'successful learner' who is both 'confident and creative' and an 'active and informed citizen' are viewed, and view themselves as failures. This perspective is supported by Sims (2017) who notes a growing emphasis on readying children for future employment detracts attention from issues of social inequality. This appears to reflect a neoliberal concern with personal responsibility, rather than focussing on the ability of the State to intervene in ways that can ameliorate the effects of poverty.

Similar values are reinforced in the three guiding principles of the EYLF, 'Belonging, Being and Becoming'. The 'belonging' theme is described as "knowing where and with whom you belong...Children belong first to a family, a cultural group a neighbourhood and a wider community" (7). This may indicate a concern that children are experiencing social disconnection and are not securely embedded within families and their broader community and culture. The attention to 'belonging' suggests that early childhood settings may seek to become places "where the desires for belonging of those who have been historically, and are currently, excluded are more readily recognised" (Sumsion and Wong, 2011: 39).

The theme of 'being' highlights goals that reinforce the need for children to fully experience "the here and now" (7). Being is described as "...about the present and [children] knowing themselves, building relationships with others, engaging with life's joys and complexities, and meeting challenges in everyday life" (7). What can be interpreted from this, is a concern that children are unsure of themselves, are not adequately connected to others through relationships, and are struggling to experience the challenges and joys of life. What is missing in this view is context. Social isolation and stressful home environments for example, often arise from economic deprivation, and can cause children to feel vulnerable or anxious at school (Andrew and Fane, 2019). The absence of context reduces children's social difficulties to something that can be wholly addressed through education.

The 'becoming' principle relates to a focus on the future, and the ways that childhood influences children's outcomes which are "...shaped by many different events and circumstances" (7). As noted, "[Becoming]...emphasises learning to participate fully and actively in society" (7). This point further reflects a focus on human capital in the EYLF (Grieshaber and Graham, 2017). This dominant neo-liberal concern with children as future workers emphasises the need to develop their capacity to become useful members of

society and its economy. Those members of society who are not active participants in society then, appear to be invisible and devalued.

The overarching goals of the EYLF are represented through five 'Learning Outcomes':

- *Children have a strong sense of identity*
- *Children are connected with and contribute to their world*
- *Children have a strong sense of wellbeing*
- *Children are involved and confident learners*
- *Children are effective communicators (EYLF: 8).*

Reading the Learning Outcomes 'backwards' (Bletsas, 2012) suggests an aspiration to address issues of children experiencing socioemotional disconnection, a lack of a *sense* of wellbeing (not necessarily objective wellbeing), problems with children being uninvolved and lacking confidence in their learning, and a dearth of effective communication skills. Additionally, Learning Outcomes highlight a change of focus in early childhood settings "from discourses of nurturing and care to those of teaching and accountability" (Grieshaber 2017: (95); Ortlipp et al. (2011)). Reflecting this, Learning Outcomes are defined in the EYLF as "a skill, knowledge or disposition that educators can actively promote in early childhood settings, in collaboration with children and families" (8). This is further evidenced in relation to play: "Play is a context for learning that...enhances dispositions such as curiosity and creativity..." (10). The EYLF (10) describes dispositions as:

enduring habits of mind and actions, and tendencies to respond in characteristic ways to situations, for example, maintaining an optimistic outlook, being willing to persevere, approaching new experiences with confidence

This is interesting from a Bourdieusian perspective; the development of particular socially dominant (and school preferred) dispositions form part of what Bourdieu refers to as habitus (Bourdieu, 1977; Bourdieu, 1993a; Bourdieu, 2005). For Bourdieu, habitus and its associated dispositions primarily arise from the family and are heavily influenced by social class. Bourdieu and others (see for example Andrew and Fane, 2019; Lareau, 2011; Lareau et al., 2016) maintain that it is the dispositions of the middle and upper classes that confer advantage in educational settings. Whilst it is not explicit, what is represented then in the EYLF is a goal of fostering middle-or upper-class dispositions and ways of being, and a

corresponding concern with an apparent lack of such characteristics. This can act to delegitimise other ways of being and risks imposing symbolic violence. The experience of symbolic violence can lead to families withdrawing from services (Lo, 2015), subsequently maintaining systems of oppression and social inequality.

The EYLF identifies 'involvement' as:

a state of intense, whole hearted mental activity, characterised by a state of sustained concentration and intrinsic motivation. Highly involved children (and adults) operate at the limit of their capacities, leading to changed ways of responding and understanding leading to deep level learning (EYLF: 10).

In applying the WPR approach to this definition, the EYLF problematises children who lack intense, sustained or intrinsically motivated learning engagement. This creates the possibility of stigmatisation and problematising children who, for various reasons, may not be adept at this approach to learning. Children who are living with learning disabilities, poverty or other adversity are arguably more likely to fail at reaching this benchmark.

Relationships between children, families and educators are emphasised throughout the EYLF and positive relationships are associated with desirable educational outcomes. This point is established and is not contentious. What is indicated however, is a concern with difficult relationships between educators and families, and a lack of "respectful and caring relationships with children and families" (12). This is noted as impeding the achievement of learning outcomes, and is subsequently a problem that the EYLF seeks to address:

Learning outcomes are most likely to be achieved when early childhood educators work in partnership with families. Educators recognise that families are children's first and most influential teachers...Partnerships are based on foundations of understanding each other's expectations and attitudes (13)

The guiding principles of the EYLF are presented as ways to support children in achieving the Learning Outcomes. Three of the five "Principles" of the EYLF (1, 2, and 4) are relationship focussed; "1. Secure, respectful and reciprocal relationships; 2. Partnerships; 3. High expectations and equity; 4. Respect for diversity; 5. Ongoing learning and reflective practice'" (13). The EYLF has a strong focus on overcoming problems of difficult or unhelpful relationships between schools and families. However, how it is that this aim can be achieved is not clear. Rouse and O'Brien (2017) argue that whilst the EYLF emphasises relationships

that are based on reciprocity, it is questionable whether such relationships can truly exist in a setting that privileges the teacher's qualifications and experiences over those of parents.

Moreover, economic disadvantage, which is strongly associated with a range of educational difficulties and educational inequities, remains largely unaddressed and unacknowledged.

The EYLF's strong focus on relationships obscures the full spectrum of the underlying causes of inequitable outcomes.

The EYLF (16-20) outlines eight pedagogical practices that are to be used to guide educators.

For example, "Holistic approaches" that recognise the "connectedness of mind, body and spirit" (16). This element of the EYLF demonstrates values that recognise children's learning as socially contingent and connected to others. This practice also highlights the importance of "reciprocal relationships for learning". Applying a WPR lens, dysfunctional relationships, or teaching approaches that ignore children's social connectedness are understood as problematic.

"Responsiveness to children" highlights the importance of educators' connection and responsiveness to every child. This practice element indicates the expectation that educators respect and work with:

...children's expertise, cultural traditions and ways of knowing, the multiple languages spoken by some children, particularly Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, and the strategies used by children with additional needs to negotiate their every day lives (16)

What is interesting about this practice is that cultural diversity is conflated with the problem of having "additional needs". The conflation seems to suggest that children who are not from the culturally dominant background require additional help, relative to children who are from the culturally dominant background, and that treating their habitus and cultural capitals with respect requires special emphasis; implying that this is not always an automatic response to such diversity.

A further problem representation connects to relationships and the ways that "Responsive learning relationships are strengthened as educators and children learn together and share decisions, respect and trust" (17). This highlights that educators and students with shared learning experiences have a greater opportunity to build strong relationships and in the absence of such engagement, learning relationships are weakened. Connected to this,

“Cultural competence” is described as the ability to “respect multiple cultural ways of knowing, seeing and living” (18). The EYLF further described cultural competence as:

being aware of one’s own world view, developing positive attitudes towards cultural differences, gaining knowledge of different cultural practices and world views, [and] developing skills for communication and interaction across cultures (19).

In addition to the educator’s orientation towards accommodating cultural difference, the EYLF recognises that the family is “central to children’s sense of *being* and *belonging*, and to success in lifelong learning” (18) and the application of the WPR lens problematises an unwillingness amongst educators to “understand and honour differences” as harmful to children’s educational outcomes. As families are understood as central in children’s educational success then, along with the educator’s level of cultural competence, they are constructed as causal factors in any perceived lack of success. This causal relationship appears to involve a heightened risk for families with “differences”.

What is important to emphasise here is the kinds of differences the EYLF points out as key causal factors and what it is that some families are *different* from. Both families and the educator’s cultural competence are identified as causal factors in education. But if some families are *different*, others must be the *same* to act as a reference group and give sense to the comparison. Following Bourdieu, it is arguable that what is understood as the norm in school environments is the white, middle class family, that embodies a particular set of understandings, traditions and practices that are a natural fit in the school-based educational setting. Consequently, not only is culture about ethnicity, it is also about the class or cultural differences that exist within ‘local’ or micro-populations. Besides mention of “community ways of being” (19) under the “Continuity of learning and transitions” heading, recognition of these local differences is not a central element of the EYLF.

“Continuity of learning and transitions” into the school setting are recognised in the EYLF as an important time in children’s lives. Connecting to culture, is the recognition that “Children bring family and community ways of *being* and *becoming* to their early childhood settings” (19) and the need for children to learn “how to *be*” in educational environments. Educators are presented as key in helping to “assist children to understand the traditions, routines and practices of the settings to which they are moving” (19). Transitions then, are seen by the EYLF as significant periods in which children need to be readied to fit into pre-existing “traditions and routines”. Subsequently, children and families who do not readily make this

transition are problematic. This indicates an expectation that whilst “differences” are to be recognised and respected, they must ultimately give way to conformity with schools, and ways of being at school. Knowing “how to *be*” at school connects to ideas of school readiness. As discussed in section 2.4, school readiness can be understood from numerous standpoints. However, what seems to be missing is an emphasis on *schools* (or school staff and leaders) knowing “how to be” when presented with difference. That is, a willingness to bend for children and families who do not conform does not seem to be valued. As such, school readiness seems to be “a condition of the child” (Kokkalia et al., 2019:10). This was discussed in more detail in Chapter Two.

Children’s transitions into school and their educational progress are evaluated through a (range of assessment measures. “Assessment for learning” is a key aspect of Australian education. The EYLF comments that “*Assessment* for children’s learning refers to the process of gathering and analysing information as evidence about what children know, can do and understand” (19). Assessment is used to:

plan effectively for children’s current and future learning...determine the extent to which all children are progressing toward realising learning outcomes and if not, what might be impeding their progress, identify children who might need extra support to achieve particular learning outcomes... (19).

The five EYLF Learning Outcomes are summarised as “key reference points against which children’s progress can be identified, documented and communicated” (20). Using the WPR approach then, children who do not attain the prescribed Learning Outcomes are problematised. For those children who do not meet or exceed a learning outcome, the assessment measures the extent to which children are either problematic, or not. For culturally diverse children “Inclusive assessment practices” are deployed, and this helps educators to “make better sense of what they have observed” (20). What this suggests is a problem for educators in understanding children’s learning progress when the children are not part of the dominant sociocultural grouping. Educators are encouraged to focus on “each child’s learning in the context of their families, drawing family perspectives, understandings, experiences and expectations” (20), and to address any problems of “unacknowledged biases” about children (20).

5.4. Summary of the ELYF analysis

Applying the WPR (Bacchi, 2012b) approach to the Australian Government's ELYF highlights a broad policy concern with low educational achievement. These problems are connected to issues about future workforce development and a need to ensure children become active citizens. These are accompanied by issues of families and their children experiencing a lack of social connection, certainty of self, and positive relationships. The presentation of these problems is not contextualised against the background of social determinants which may underpin and shape them. Rather, what is reflected is the dominant neoliberal tendency to locate the causes of social problems within families thus obscuring the role government can play in producing and maintaining social inequality. This is particularly pertinent in the Tasmanian context, which is characterised by above national average levels of socioeconomic disadvantage.

5.5. Analysis of the Guide to Reading and Using Tasmania's Strategy for Children- Pregnancy to Eight Years 2018-2021

Tasmania's Strategy for Children - Pregnancy to Eight Years 2018-2021 (the Strategy) (DoE, 2017c: 2) is "directly linked to the State Government's policy priority of lifting education outcomes for all Tasmanian children". Subsequently, the Strategy has a deep influence on early years education in Tasmania and provides information about the DoE's guiding principles. The *Guide to Reading and Using Tasmania's Strategy for Children- Pregnancy to Eight Years 2018-2021* (the Guide) provides a rich explanation of the Strategy itself, and its application, and so was examined in this analysis, in addition to the standalone Strategy document. The Strategy was developed by the Tasmanian Department of Education in consultation with a range of stakeholders including family and community groups.

Tasmania's Strategy for Children - Pregnancy to Eight Years 2018-2021 is intended for use:

...across agencies and communities, to provide quality provision for improving the education, health and wellbeing outcomes of children from pregnancy to eight years in Tasmania (3).

The Strategy is divided into three main parts, that outline "What we are aiming for", "What we will focus on", and "How we will know" (3). My aim was to understand the goals of the policy and what problems it seeks to address, and so the first section, "What we are aiming for" forms the focus of this analysis. This section of the Strategy is further divided into five key areas: *Children, Families, Communities, Environments* and *Service Providers* (3). The aims

of the Strategy are broadly guided by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN, 1989) and like the EYLF, are aspirational. Applying the WPR approach suggests that what is outlined in the Strategy is not being achieved (when it came into effect in 2018).

The introductory pages of the Guide provide a description of “Why Tasmania needs a Strategy for Children” (2) and form the largest part of this analysis. The first, and central, problem evidenced in the Guide is that Tasmanian children are failing to “reach their full potential” (2). The Guide cites research from neuroscientific studies confirming that “early experiences in life shape a child’s future, particularly in relation to their health and learning outcomes” (2) and that “Key actions that support optimal brain development and positive futures for young children include protecting them from adverse social and environmental conditions” (2). What is immediately clear, is an expressed problem of sub-optimal brain development amongst Tasmanian children who may be exposed to harmful conditions during what is a developmentally important period. A related problem is seen in “the capacities of people; in their role as parents and carers, particularly for children and families who are experiencing disadvantage or vulnerability” (2). Indirectly communicated, is that people who are living with socioeconomic disadvantage or other difficulties are less adept at parenting children in ways that support their brain development. Subsequently, the Guide communicates a concern regarding parents who lack the capacity to raise children in ways that support them in realising their potential. In response, the Tasmanian Government provides ‘family support’ and improved early childhood experiences through education programs:

With high levels of social disadvantage and vulnerability in Tasmanian communities, compared to other states and territories, the provision of high quality early childhood experiences and family support is essential (2).

In noting Tasmania’s “high levels of social disadvantage” the government draws a link between disadvantage and children’s developmental outcomes but does not directly acknowledge the well-understood economic influences on developmental inequality. Rather, the focus remains on the actions of parents. The focus seems to encourage the audience to reduce the social issues the policy aims to address, to the failings of individuals. The statement that “getting it right in the early years means getting it right for life” (2)

problematises those early childhoods, children, and their families who are not getting it “right”. The centrality of the early years for children’s development and life chances is unequivocally supported in the literature, there is however a risk of stigmatising those parents who are seen as failing, when many (not all) of the factors that render them ‘vulnerable’ are structural and lie outside the immediate control of families (McDonald, 2010). This point is not acknowledged in the document, and while success in education has been exemplary in some cases, it is not an effective policy measure for the reduction of social disadvantage at a population level (Callander et al., 2012).

One of the ways that the Strategy outlines how “we will know” when its goals are achieved, is that “...Families are confident and capable of supporting their child’s development” (3). Again, the Strategy implies there is a shortage of capabilities within families who do not ‘achieve’, without mention of social disadvantage. Whilst the literature supports the view that families living with disadvantage experience higher rates of family disfunction and parenting difficulty, there can be multiple causal factors. For example, chronic stress commonly arises from living in poverty, and the additional demands this situation makes on parents, rather than an inherent lack of ability can interfere with optimal parenting (McDonald, 2010). Moreover, how it is that families can become “confident and capable” is not detailed. The ways we understand ‘capable’ or ‘good parenting’ are informed by sociocultural standpoints and socioeconomic positioning (Lareau, 2011). The Strategy does not acknowledge this. This makes the ‘goal posts’ that parents need to reach unclear.

5.6. Analysis of Tasmania’s Strategy for Children - Pregnancy to Eight Years 2018-2021 (the Strategy)

This section examines the Strategy itself and focusses on the five key areas where the Strategy expresses “...What we are aiming for” (3). The Strategy is a one page, poster style document that “outlines shared purpose and practices for all Tasmanian service providers that focus on improving the education, health and wellbeing outcomes of children from pregnancy to eight years” (3).

The Strategy heading *Children* outlines aspirations for Tasmanian children, for example, “Children are safe, valued and connected to their family and community”, and “Children are recognised as capable, creative thinkers with unlimited potential” (3). In a similar way to the EYLF, the Strategy implicitly communicates concerns about children’s relationships with

their families and communities, and their abilities to be independent and creative. This aspect of the Strategy highlights problems with family cohesion, social disfunction, and the nurturing of children's learning and early development. While the safety of children is important, what makes many children unsafe (for example, family violence or exposure to high levels of stress) tends to arise from kinds of social problems (McDonald et al., 2012; Neuman et al., 2018) that are not mentioned in the Guide or the Strategy. Moreover, the implication that children are not 'valued' and that children are not 'recognised' as capable has the potential to promote the stigmatisation of families based on perceptions of difference.

In a related way the Strategy goals for *Families*: "Families have hopes and dreams for themselves and their children" (3) from a WPR view problematise a lack of aspiration amongst Tasmanian families. Aspiration connects to the importance of individual effort to ensure educational success, thereby locating lack of educational success as an individual shortcoming (Fuller, 2014).

These problem representations point to the role of families in helping children to reach their potential and suggest that Tasmanian families lack some of the social, emotional, and material resources needed to adequately support these goals: "*Families are empowered to nurture and support their children*", and "*Families have access to the resources needed to provide safe, healthy and nurturing environments for their children*" (3). Reading these points 'backwards' (Bletsas, 2012) reveals areas of deficit (or perceived deficit) amongst Tasmanian families. This means that families can be perceived as incapable or unwilling to support their children, when they are suffering as the result of economic deprivation and its effects.

The Strategy defines *Communities* as "social or cultural groups or networks that share a common purpose, heritage, rights and responsibilities and/or other bonds", which may be "the community within early childhood settings, extended kinships, the local geographic community and broader Australian society" (6). The *Communities* goals outlined in the Strategy broadly relate to improving social cohesion and reaching consensus regarding children's development. For example, the Strategy's assertion that "Communities focus on [the] health, wellbeing, needs and goals of children and their families" (3) implies areas of

concern regarding communities and the ways that communities' care for children's health and wellbeing. This connects to and expands points about families' capabilities by looking at these problems as not only belonging to specific families, but also to families, or communities that fit a 'type.' Socioeconomic disadvantage in Tasmania, as in other jurisdictions, tends to exist in geographic clusters. This is largely due to the ways that affordable and social housing are located and distributed across the state, which creates neighbourhoods of families who are experiencing socioeconomic disadvantage. The result of this is communities of families who are living with chronic stress and day-to-day material deprivation that make it difficult for them to give attention to "health, wellbeing, needs and goals" (6). There is an emphasis on communities to "work together", "focus on health..." and "make decisions and take action to improve outcomes for children". This seems to negate the role of the State in fostering the conditions to make it possible for 'communities' to reach these ambitions. Playing down the role of the State represents a kind of 'neoliberal community development' (Fraser, 2020). The Strategy describes the goals of "working towards overcoming barriers" (3) without indicating how these structural barriers can be overcome.

Environments details aspirations and values regarding all the places where children live and visit; and includes:

the surrounding things, conditions, or influences; surroundings; milieu and ecology as well as the social and cultural forces that shape the life of a person or a population, but not restricted to: physical, cultural, social, relational, emotional, geographical, political and aesthetic environments (6).

The goals expressed in the Strategy for children's environments include that:

Environments are welcoming, safe, consistent and inclusive; Environments support children to wonder, experience and question the world around them; Environments are adaptive, flexible, and sustainable; Environments provide challenges and appropriate risk taking opportunities that help build resilience; Environments are created to be inclusive and respectful of people from all cultures and backgrounds (3).

Given the all-encompassing scope of “environments” defined in the Strategy, these goals are largely beyond the scope and means of individual service providers and families to achieve. When considered on a service and government level however, there is more that can be done to support their attainment. Tasmania’s CFCs are an example of the ways that governments and service providers can collaborate to create places for families that “support children to wonder, experience and question the world around them” (3) that are welcoming, safe and inclusive of all people.

Service Providers goals communicate that the Strategy’s focus on strengthening relationships between families and service providers is crucial to continuing to build families engagement with services (DoE, 2017c). Applying a WPR lens to the service providers goal “Service providers are valued and supported in all communities” highlights that service providers and the work they do is presently devalued in communities, (3). The aspirations outlined in the Strategy regarding service providers indicate a focus on skills development and improving relationships, communities, and families:

Service providers build strong respectful partnerships with children, families, communities and each other; Service providers are confident, skilled and knowledgeable; Service providers are reflective researchers who are engaged in lifelong learning.

According to the Strategy, while there is a need to develop the capacities of families, there is also a need to develop the relationships between families and educators.

5.7. Summary of Tasmania’s Strategy for Children analysis

Examining *Tasmania’s Strategy for Children- Pregnancy to Eight Years 2018-2021*, and its accompanying *Guide* using the WPR method (Bacchi, 2012b) converts implicit or obscured problem statements into explicit accounts. This approach has highlighted the child development and educational concerns that the Strategy aims to address. Learning outcomes, neurological development, parents’ skills and capacities, lack of aspiration, and relationships between service providers, families, and communities were prescient issues in the Guide and in the Strategy. Reflecting Foucault’s perspectives of discourse, power and governmentality, WPR reveals the political perspectives that underpin problematisations and their proposed solutions (Beutler and Fenech, 2018). In questioning what is unsaid or

silenced what is assumed as ‘truth’ becomes evident. This analysis shows that the ways that economic deprivation and the effects of poverty impact children’s development and educational attainment are minimised in the Strategy. Reflecting the broader socio-political environment in which policy is embedded, this is common to the dominant neoliberal political ideologies that tend to focus less on providing income support that affords families comfortable lives, and more on ways of addressing perceived inadequacies of individuals or groups (classes) of people (Andrew and Fane, 2019). As such, the Strategy can be seen as an example of neoliberal policy.

Whilst the goals of both the EYLF and the Strategy are worthwhile and speak to social justice values, the documents do not describe all the known causal factors involved in improving educational outcomes and diminishing social inequality. Tertiary level factors such as “Material circumstances, the social environment, psychosocial factors, behaviours, and biological factors” (10) are shaped by secondary level factors of “social position, which is shaped by education, occupation, income, gender, ethnicity and race” (10). However, all of these are underpinned by primary level factors including “the socio-political and cultural and social context in which they sit” (10). Marmot (2010) found that for meaningful improvements to occur, all of these must be addressed. I have argued that the policies examined seek to influence some of the tertiary and secondary level factors (behaviours, the social environment, and education for example), but do not explicitly acknowledge the influence of other secondary level and primary level influences. While neoliberalism takes many forms, this omission is common in policies that seek to reduce the role of government in people’s lives, and subsequently tend to reduce their provision of welfare, or services for citizens (Redden, 2019). Whilst a now hegemonic form of governance in developed capitalist nations, neoliberalism can have a deleterious effect on the poorest members of society (Harvey, 2007; Redden, 2019). This form of governance connects to welfare and the ‘welfare state’ which are discussed in Chapter Two.

The next section of this chapter focuses on the thematic analysis of Tasmanian DoE parent information documents.

5.8. Part Two, Parent Brochure Analysis

5.8.1. Thematic analysis of parent information brochures

A range of information brochures were collected from school/CFC reception, entry areas, classrooms or other prominent places during fieldwork visits. As previously discussed, this analysis began with the selection of documents for examination, using purposive sampling. The brochures selected for analysis are intended to give parents an overview of programs, expectations, and ideas about the birth- kinder period. The brochures titled 'Child and Family Centres', 'Starting Kindergarten', 'Get Involved in Your Child's Education', 'Ready to Start School Checklist', 'At What Age Does My Child Start/Leave School?', were produced by the DoE in 2013. 'Launching into Learning', and 'Kinder Ready', were also produced by the DoE but were not dated.

Documents were analysed using a thematic analysis approach informed by Ezzy (2002) and began with a thorough line-by-line reading and re-reading of all documents. This was accompanied by note taking. This immersive practice enabled me to develop deep familiarity with the text and became the basis for analysis (Ezzy, 2002: 89).

During these earliest stages of analysis, I engaged in manual coding using a 'broad-brush' (or open coding) technique, looking for patterns or ideas within and between data, seeking to identify themes or ideas from the data and assemble a "systematic account" of observations (Ezzy, 2002: 86). This phase involved drawing out the important statements, words, or themes, paragraph-by-paragraph. These were recorded in handwritten notes which accompanied each document. This 'hands-on' approach to coding helped me to develop a deep familiarity with the transcripts, and the coding procedure. Notes during this phase also included my ideas about overarching themes and that might be emerging, as well as possible connections to the Bourdieusian concepts, such as social capital. What was unsaid, implied, or assumed was also considered and recorded in my analysis notes. For example, an emphasis on parental responsibility and engagement was evident from the earliest stages. As analysis progressed, themes were given labels that represented the salient ideas represented in each category. Open coding involved a process of ongoing reflection, notetaking and revisiting, breaking codes into subcategories, and integrating others into codes that better fitted (Ezzy, 2002: 93).

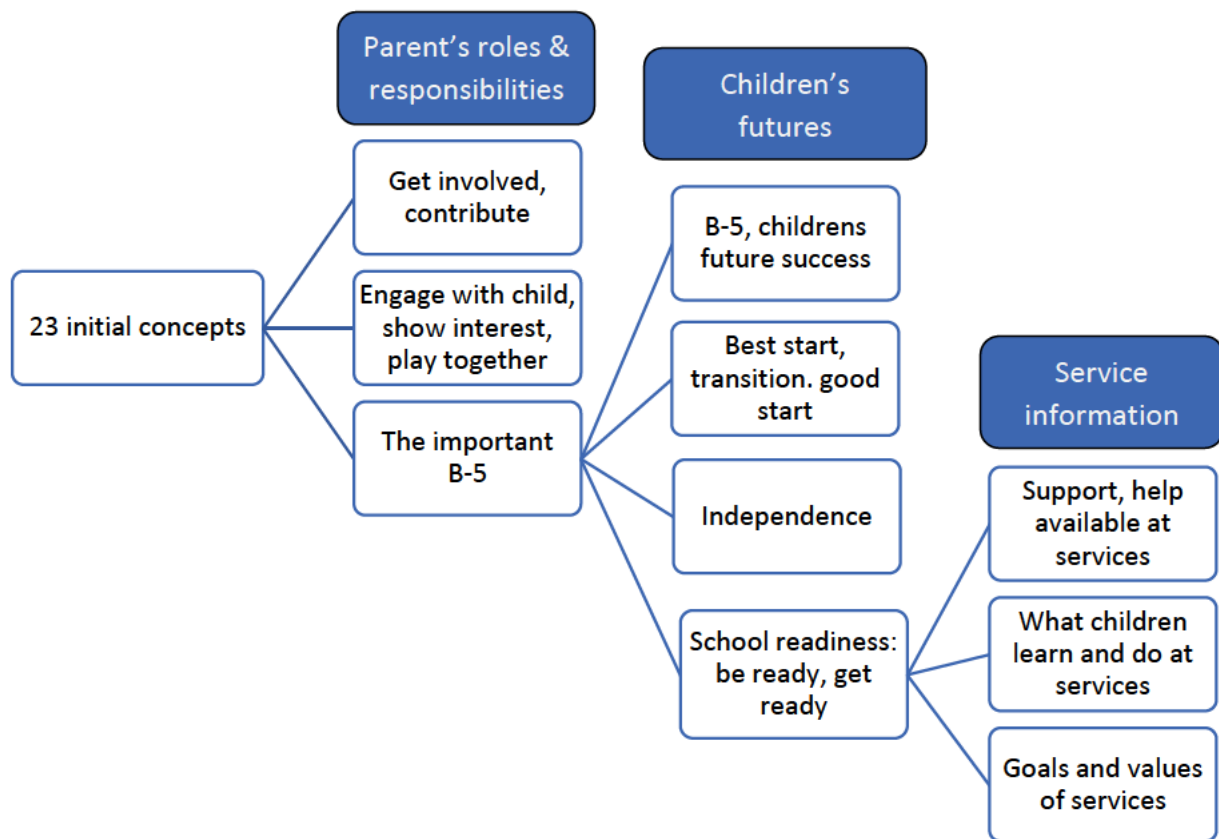
Open coding was followed by axial coding in which codes were further interrogated. Ezzy (2002) notes that during axial coding, connections between codes are considered, patterns are identified, data is reviewed. This process resulted in 23 themes and concepts being identified. For example, 'School ready children', 'Uniform items/costs', 'Fun', 'Children's future success', 'Parents' skills and learning', 'Research', and 'Toileting'. Ten themes that were more salient were examined further. These were:

- 'Get involved, contribute',
- 'Best start, good start, transition',
- 'Children's future success',
- 'The important B-5⁴ (for school readiness)',
- 'Engage, show interest, play together',
- 'Children's independence',
- 'Support and help at services',
- 'Goals and values of services',
- 'Children's learning, what children learn at services,
- 'School readiness, children not ready, be ready, get ready'.

In the final stage of selective coding, themes were further collapsed into three overarching message themes that formed the 'central story' (Ezzy, 2002: 93) around which other categories/codes are connected. This process identified three overarching messages: Parent's Roles and Responsibilities, Children's Futures, Service Information. These are depicted in Figure 5.

⁴ B-5 refers to the period from birth until five years of age. It is widely recognised as a key period in children's development and is increasingly targeted in intervention strategies.

Figure 5: Overview of themes



The tables below show each of the ten sub-themes, grouped in three separate tables according to their overarching major theme. Whilst this is useful in demonstrating the process of analysis and presenting exemplars, there were numerous areas of thematic overlap where particular ideas or messages did not fit neatly into a single category. For example, messaging regarding school readiness ultimately guided all messaging, but was most pointed regarding parents' responsibilities, and children's future success.

Table 4: Parent's roles and responsibilities

Theme	Examples
Get involved, contribute	<p><i>Research shows that children do better at school when their parents are involved in their education (Artefact #3)</i></p> <p><i>Talk to your child's teacher or principal about how you can get involved in your child's education (Artefact #3).</i></p>

Theme	Examples
Engage with child, show interest, play together	<p><i>When you spend time playing with your child you make a real difference to their future (Artefact #1)</i></p> <p><i>Talk, read and play with your child every day (Artefact #6)</i></p> <p><i>Being involved in your child's education adds to their school experience and sends a clear message that their education is important to you (Artefact #3).</i></p>
The important B-5 (for School Readiness)	<p><i>Schools are offering a range of programs to support children and their families during the important early years (from Birth - 5) (Artefact #6).</i></p> <p><i>Children learn a lot in their first five years of life before they start school. It is important for you and your child to learn together to give your child the very best start to life (Artefact #1).</i></p>

Table 5: Children's Futures

Themes	Examples
B-5, children's future success	<p><i>Young children learn an enormous amount between birth and age 5. The skills and values learned in the first few years of life stay with children forever and affect their ability to learn and succeed for their rest of their lives (Artefact #2).</i></p> <p><i>It is now widely known that the early years are critical to a child's ongoing development. The more positive experiences children have during this time, the more successful their future outcomes are likely to be (Artefact #6).</i></p>
Best start, transitions, good start	<p><i>The Department of Education wants all children and their families to have the best possible start to the school year (Artefact #4)</i></p>

Themes	Examples
	<p><i>Schools offer early years' programs to support families and young children's learning and transition to school (Artefact # 2).</i></p> <p><i>Be confident with your child about their first day (Artefact # 4).</i></p> <p><i>Supporting children's learning experiences and health before they even begin school will give them a greater chance of success (Artefact #1).</i></p>
Independence	<p><i>[At Kindergarten children]: Will learn independence, confidence and skills for getting along with others (Artefact #2).</i></p> <p><i>[The first day of Kindergarten]: Let your child dress themselves as much as possible (Artifact #4).</i></p>
School readiness: be ready, get ready	<p><i>There are things you can do to help make sure your child is as prepared as possible for their first day of school (Artefact #4).</i></p> <p><i>Get organised at home (Artefact #4).</i></p> <p><i>If you feel your child is not ready for school, you should discuss your options with the school principal at your local school (Artefact #5).</i></p>

Table 6: Service Information

Themes	Examples
Support, help available at services	<p><i>There are places where you and your child can go to have fun, be supported and have access to health services (Artefact #1).</i></p> <p><i>Schools offer programs to support families and young children before Kinder: These include Birth to 5 initiatives, Launching into Learning, and pre-Kindergarten sessions (Artefact #5).</i></p> <p><i>Many schools also have groups specifically for parents and carers, such as Parents and Friend groups (Artefact #3).</i></p>
What children learn and do at services	<p><i>[At Kindergarten children]: Learn through play and activities planned by the teacher (Artefact # 2).</i></p>

Themes	Examples
	<p><i>[At LiL] Families can have lots of fun playing and doing activities together that help develop children's literacy, numeracy, creative, social and motor skills (Artefact #6).</i></p> <p><i>At Child and Family Centres you can: Attend many fun learning programs with your child such as Launching into Learning (Artefact #1).</i></p>
Goals, requirements, and values of services	<p><i>The purpose of Child and Family Centres is to improve the health and wellbeing, education, and care of Tasmania's very young children by supporting families (Artefact #1).</i></p> <p><i>By law, your child is required to attend school full-time from the age of five (Artefact #5).</i></p> <p><i>The Department of Education wants all children and their families to have the best possible start to the school year (Artefact #4)</i></p>

As illustrated, the concepts are connected. Broadly speaking however, the first two themes focus on families and children, and the third is centred on services. The importance of the birth to five-year period is emphasised and connects to Parents' Roles and Responsibilities, and Children's Futures. Likewise, School Readiness links to Service Information.

A final level of theory-led analysis (Edwards, 2010) was then carried out. This process involved using a Bourdieusian 'lens' to identify theoretical categories, themes and exemplars in order to highlight ways that the documents reflect particular values, assumptions and expectations of parents and children. In this analysis, Bourdieu's concepts of cultural capital, social capital, habitus, field and symbolic violence were used "to think with" (Jenkins, 1992) and they provided a useful way to understand the documents.

5.9. Parent's responsibilities

The key messaging in the analysed documents conveyed the idea that parent's involvement in their children's early years education is essential, and that parents ought to be involved with this in multiple ways, and not just at home (see Table 4). This is presented as being most important during the period from birth to age five, and that what happens during this time has lifelong consequences. Services offered by the DoE are discussed as places where

particular child development goals and values are upheld, and where parents should actively participate, and seek help if required.

Throughout the documents, there was a clear emphasis on the role and responsibilities of parents in providing children access to services and learning opportunities that would best prepare them for school entry. Whilst services were positioned as supports, and places to get help, the overarching message conveyed in the materials was that the ultimate responsibility for preparing children for schooling, belongs to parents/carers. This was expressed through messages that encouraged parents to ‘get involved’ with educating their children both at home, and through services. One way this message was presented was in terms of research, and a scientific lens; “Did you know...Research shows that children do better at school when their parents are involved in their education” (Artefact 3). The need for parents to actively and deliberately engage in learning activities with children was made explicit throughout the materials examined. Parents are implored to take “an active interest in your child’s day” (Artefact 3), “talk, read and play with your child every day” (Artefact 6), “...be the best parent you can be” (Artefact 1). This messaging was supported by information regarding the importance of children’s early years and the B-5 period. This highlights the time sensitive nature of children’s learning, and the need for parents to support children’s learning *now (and yesterday, and tomorrow)*. The importance of the B-5/early years period is emphasised throughout all the materials and is apparent in both the themes of *Parental Responsibility* and *Children’s Futures*.

5.10. Children’s futures

Connected to parent’s responsibilities was an explicit emphasis on the centrality of the early years in securing positive futures for children (see Table 5). Strengthening the legitimacy of this messaging, there were references to research which clearly signalled the centrality of the birth- five years period. The ways that children’s early experiences construct an enduring foundation for future development were highlighted; “...the first few years of life stay with children forever and affect their ability to learn and succeed for their rest of their lives” (Artefact #2). The literature behind these arguments is unequivocal (COAG, 2009). However, the DoE’s consistent emphasis on parental responsibility minimises the role of the state and obscures the impact of socioeconomic positioning. This approach risks

stigmatising families and creating guilt and shame amongst those parents who are unable to provide children with optimal conditions for development.

A connection between children's futures and their transition into schooling (or school readiness) was emphasised, with a "good start" laying the foundation for educational and lifelong success. What this success *is* appears to be connected to the ideals of neoliberalism, individual responsibility and a future as a productive citizen. Whilst it is clear that a good start at school confers advantages to children and their families (Ciolan et al. 2014) what actually constitutes a good start is unclear. Moreover, what is understood by the government and schools as a good start is likely to be heavily informed by their professional and social habitus. This may be significantly different from the perspectives of families. What is clear though, is that children's physical and social independence and confidence forms part of a good start, with independence being a recurrent theme across the documents. Interlinked with independence is school readiness. Readiness for school was a dominant focus of the documents, with LiL being positioned as a readiness program. The AEDC is one measure of children's readiness that is utilised in Australian schools (AEDC, 2017). Aligning with the AEDC's focus on children's health and physical preparedness for school, one aspect of school readiness expressed in the parent brochures included ensuring children are fully immunised (ready to start school checklist) and ensuring that any medical conditions are communicated to children's school. This is perhaps unsurprising given the target audience- parents of children who are soon to enter school. School readiness is discussed in detail in Chapter Two.

5.11. Service information

The documents examined provided overview and basic information about DoE early childhood services that are available to parents (see Table 6). DoE services mentioned in the documents analysed were Kindergarten, Child and Family Centres, Launching into Learning (printed in bold text when mentioned in all the brochures- perhaps highlighting the value and centrality that DoE places on this service). The Tasmanian Department of Health's Child Health and Parenting Service, which is primarily targeted at children from birth to four years, was also mentioned. Documents encouraged parents to initiate contact with school principals, teachers, school associations, parents and friends' committees for example. What is interesting is that the onus for contact was clearly directed to parents/carers. This

makes sense from a logistical perspective for schools. However, this focus neglects that many parents, particularly those residing in areas where more people are experiencing disadvantage, find engagement with schools and school staff intimidating and uncomfortable. The evidence for this is ample (see for example Barg (2019); Lareau (2011)). For parents, schools may be places associated with negative memories from their own schooling, they may feel under equipped to deal with school staff who can be perceived as threatening or judgemental. This means that parents may be apprehensive about initiating contact with schools in the ways outlined by the DoE in information brochures.

A Bourdieusian perspective highlights the ways that cultural capital and habitus shape differences in how parents and schools communicate school related expectations. For example,

“Talk to your child’s teacher about how you can get involved in your child’s education...Enquire at your child’s school about being part of the School Association” (DoE, Get Involved in Your Child’s Education, 2013).

“If you feel your child is not ready for school, you should discuss our options with the school principal at your local school” (DoE, 2013 At What Age Does My Child Start/Leave School?).

The assumptions implicit in these statements are that parents have types of cultural capital that mean they are comfortable with talking with teachers and principals, that parents can ‘get involved’ (although they need to be directed to do so). Moreover, that they are skilled and confident enough to be part of a school association, and that parents have a responsibility to decide and act accordingly on whether children are ‘ready’ for school.

These perspectives reflect culturally dominant middle-class views and values of education systems (Lareau 2011), and Bourdieu might argue they are arbitrarily imposed on parents as natural, given, established ways of relating to schools and the people who run them. There is, therefore, the risk of the (unintended) consequence of symbolic violence. That is, parents experience these communications as taken-for-granted and legitimate directives.

Consequently, parents who are not high in dominant middle-class forms of cultural capital can feel (and be viewed as) alienated, judged, and unworthy of school involvement. In response, parents may engage in active resistance to the messaging and experience of their children’s schooling, which is by being legally enshrined, imposed upon families, and imbued with value laden rules and expectations.

Applying a Bourdieusian view suggests that the DoE utilises its symbolic capital through the brochures examined to guide and shape parental behaviours and expectations regarding their children's early education, or at least to attempt such. There is a clear emphasis on the role of families, and an expectation that families will share (or at least enact) the same habitus and practices of schools and accept the ways of schools as legitimate. This expectation goes largely unquestioned, such that parents who are not at ease with such practices may experience this as symbolic violence. Parents are implored to actively engage with their children and the DoE during the B-5 years and to do so in particular (school approved) ways.

5.12. Document analysis discussion

The aim of the analysis of the EYLF and the Guide was to uncover the values, justifications and approaches that are used to inform early childhood service provision in Tasmania. Using the WPR approach (Bacchi, 2012b) 'problem representations' in both documents were identified. This is important, as these policy documents help to guide the way that early childhood education services function, how educators connect with families and children and the goals that governments have for services and service outcomes. The analysis of Tasmania DoE parent information brochures utilised a thematic analysis approach as described by Ezzy (2002). This analysis aimed to identify key messages that the DoE convey to families through the information brochures. This was important, as these messages communicate expectations and values to parents, which shape the ways that they experience early childhood education settings, and how their engagement with services is interpreted by educators. When considered together, the analysis of all eight documents has produced a picture of the values, socio-political ideas and messages that guide government education service delivery in Tasmania.

Unsurprisingly, there were numerous consistencies between both the EYLF and the Guide, as the EYLF is intended by the Federal Government to inform service delivery on a national scale. The Guide and the Strategy itself are informed then, by the EYLF. The key problem representation in both documents was a lack of educational and social achievement amongst young children and adults. This was expressed in multiple ways and was connected to learning outcomes, but the salient message was one of educational underachievement. This underachievement was characterised in the EYLF for example, as a lack of confidence

and creativity, and in both documents, as a failing amongst children and families to reach their potential. The Guide extended this to discuss concerns regarding the brain development of young Tasmanians, and largely attributed suboptimal neurological development to the effects of children living in a disadvantaged state and poor parenting. This perspective was supported in the messaging of the DoE's parent information brochures which strongly emphasised parents' responsibilities to "get involved" and contribute to children's futures, and the centrality of the early years for securing children's future success.

Connected to early brain development, a salient message identified in the thematic analysis was the role of parents as 'first teachers.' The imperative that parents accept this responsibility, and to be involved with early childhood education programs, or risk their child's future success was emphasised. Whilst 'support' for parents in doing so is indicated, there is an assumption that this support is assembled in a way that suits the needs of families. This connects to Bourdieu's arguments about the ways that educational institutions are self-legitimising and have a tendency to problematise what is viewed as a lack of compliance. Rather, non-compliance often represents the utilisation of a form of cultural capital (resistance) in response to feeling ill at ease (Lo, 2015).

The Strategy has a strong focus on the heightened social problems that are experienced in Tasmania. This is largely represented as a lack of capacity amongst Tasmanian families to raise children, and the problems of suboptimal brain development amongst children as a result. Families who are living with socioeconomic disadvantage are specified as requiring special help in this regard. This approach, which is evident in both documents, risks stigmatising low income families as incapable, without acknowledging the direct impact that poverty has on parents and parenting. Socioeconomic disadvantage often results in high levels of stress in families. Stress can powerfully constrain parents' abilities to provide children with a positive environment that optimises brain development (McDonald, 2010). Whilst it is established that early intervention programs and services are valuable in helping to ameliorate some of the effects of this, parents remain constructed as 'the problem'. I argue that this subjects families to symbolic violence (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977) (see Chapter Three). Instead of clearly acknowledging the social determinants of health, wellbeing and educational outcomes, the analysis highlights a problematisation of parents and parenting. In keeping with the hegemonic neoliberal approach, a focus on parents and

parenting shifts responsibility away from the state, as well as the structural and social origins of these ‘problems’. This view is also identified in my analysis of the DoE information brochures for parents of young children.

Another consistent theme throughout the analysis was an emphasis on children’s transition to the education setting. Transition into schooling is a sensitive period for children and families as they often engage with new settings, routines and expectations (Janus and Duku, 2007; Kaplun et al., 2017). The focus on transition is part of school readiness, which was often a salient but implicit theme, throughout the analysis of the policy documents. However, school readiness was directly addressed in DoE parent information brochures. This was primarily accompanied by messaging that emphasised parents’ responsibilities to ensure their children are “ready”. For example, “...There are things you can do to help make sure your child is as prepared as possible for their first day of school” (Artefact #4), “Get organised at home” (Artefact #4). Other important aspects of school readiness such as schools’ readiness for children, and community school readiness (discussed in more detail in Chapter Two) were not presented. Taken alone, it makes sense that school information brochures for parents encourage families to get ready. When considered in the broader context of the EYLF and the Guide however, a strong focus on the responsibilities of parents is evident. Subsequently, when children do not meet the expectations of schools and educators, parents are often viewed as the problem. This is evidenced in the same policy documents purporting that parents lack skill and motivation. Lack of readiness and subsequent underachievement of potential was implicitly connected to an issue of children not going on to become active, informed and useful citizens. What is implied is that such individuals are problematic, because they are not economically productive, highlighting the centrality of neoliberalism in policy design and delivery.

The importance of relationships was emphasised throughout both the EYLF and the Guide. Relationships between families, children and educators, as well as children’s abilities to form caring and supportive bonds with their parents and peers were problematised. Whilst the centrality of positive relationships is unequivocally supported (Arapi and Hamel, 2021), what remains unaddressed in the documents, is the ways that relationships between services, service providers and families can be shaped by what is expected of families when they are using services. That is, services are formed around a particular set of state

supported and hegemonic social values. These are expressed in the ways that influence how it is that children and their families are expected to engage with services. A failure for families to form positive relationships with service providers may reflect families' resistance to symbolic violence (Lo, 2015) rather than parental shortcomings. The need for parents to engage in particular ways with education (for example by attending specific government programs or by interacting one-on-one with children whilst at LiL) is made clear in the parent information brochure analysis. Families are implored to contribute, and "get involved". This implies that if families are not engaged with specific services, in specific ways, that they are not adequately supporting their child's early development.

The policy documents conflate cultural diversity with families having special needs. Families who are not from the culturally dominant background are understood as needing a particular kind of support- presumably because their habitus and cultural capitals are 'different' and that help is needed for such people assimilate, so that they learn 'how to be' at school. However, there exists some ambiguity regarding acceptance of difference. The EYLF for example, implores educators to "understand and honour differences" (18). It appears though, that this tolerance of differences has boundaries that end where the need for conformity begins. This highlights a paradox. Schools are required to help people know 'how to be', whilst simultaneously offering acceptance (or tolerance at least) of differences. This need to regulate and assimilate not only applies to ethnic differences, but also to the cultural differences that exist between families from differing social backgrounds. How it is that schools can overcome these competing ideals is not clear.

5.13. Chapter conclusion

This chapter has presented the aims and perspectives that are communicated in key early education policy and parent information documents. A concern with parents' responsibilities was evident in the parent brochures, and a concern with their weaknesses was evident in the policy documents. Common to neoliberal policy, the socially contingent aspects of parenting were largely unproblematised and unaddressed. This gives rise to the potential for symbolic violence and a self-legitimation of institutional practices, highlighting the ways that hegemonic political standpoints directly and indirectly shape the lives of families and children. The following chapters will present the ethnographic work conducted in this study. These will explore how families experience Tasmanian DoE early

education, primarily through their engagement with CFCs and LiL, bringing context to the findings of the document analyses. The next chapter, Chapter 6 will present findings from the ethnographic research.

Chapter 6: Ethnographic Results

This chapter presents the key findings from interviews and participant observation with parents and service providers.

This chapter primarily addresses:

Question Two: How are families using LiL?

Question Three: What are the key factors that shape families' use of and engagement with LiL? and,

Question Four: How do families and service providers understand the purposes of LiL, and do they share the same understandings?

The chapter is structured into three main thematic categories which emerged through the fieldwork data analysis. These themes help to answer the research questions by shedding light on how parents use LiL, factors that support and constrain their engagement, and how they (and teachers) understand the purposes of LiL.

These themes are titled 'Complex Lives', 'Isolation' and 'Features of Services', and they encompass the main findings from the ethnographic research. For simplicity, themes have been presented under separate headings, however they did not emerge in standalone, distinct categories but rather, tended to be overlapping.

Each theme is presented with an accompanying vignette. Vignettes were compiled using quotes from multiple participants to illustrate their lived experiences. Participants' accounts of their experiences and lives were rich with meaning. All names used in the vignettes are pseudonyms.

The following vignette 'A morning at LiL' gives an overview of a 'typical' LiL session and was drawn from my fieldnotes collected over several visits during April to July in 2018.

6.1. Setting the scene, a morning at LiL

8.35am-10.55am

I walked around the River Town schoolyard and one of the buildings before the gates were opened. There was a grounds man tidying up the central play area, but other than that there were few people to be seen. As I walked through one of the buildings,

I passed the staffroom, the door was open- teachers were gathered inside having a staff meeting. The principal was speaking encouragingly. After a few minutes, the quiet playground sprang into life as the gates were unlocked, and children, parents, grandparents, and other adult carers flowed into the school ground. Teachers emerged from the meeting, heading off in different directions to their classes.

The LiL room set up, ready for families to arrive. On a bench by the door was a 'sign-in' book and paper notices for parents about upcoming activities. Child sized tables and chairs were set up with two cutting and pasting 'learning jobs' (fish themed), a sensory activity using shaving cream in the wet area, and a colouring-in table loaded with a stack of printed pictures, and pots containing chunky crayons and pencils. The walls of the room were lined with children's pictures and craft work, and there was a large interactive white board at the front. One side of the room was lined with benches with storage cupboards under. Stuck to the cupboard doors were posters showing primary colours. On top was a sink and coffee making facilities. The back wall was rimmed with wooden shelves containing baskets of puzzles, blocks, and games. On the far wall were large windows and a door opening to the outside play area. There was a trolley containing colorful books, tables with cars, dinosaurs, and assorted plastic animals. There were also dolls prams and a 'kitchen corner'. In the opposite corner was a walk-in storage area. The shelves were heaving with games, toys, art supplies, a 'dress-ups' box, small percussion instruments, and other assorted learning resources.

Soon families began to arrive for LiL and children were directed to a range of activities as they entered the bright and warm classroom. There were fourteen parents/carers at LiL today, including two Dads, and one grandmother. There were 19 children, including three infants with their toddler siblings. Mrs Johnson and the Teacher Aide, Ms Andrews greeted everyone by name and directed them to the activities. The LiL room became quite crowded, and soon had a distinct, slightly humid aroma from warm bodies, closed windows, and art supplies like paint- neither pleasant nor unpleasant. Most children were very engaged in the activities, a few others wandered the room.

Mrs Johnson spent time holding and talking to the smallest baby. She seemed to have a calm, easy relationship with the baby's Mum. Another baby was secured in a rocker, crying whilst his mother was busy getting him a bottle. I picked up the baby and held him. A little girl (age 3) was very interested and came over to look at the baby with her Dad who talked to her about when she was as little as the baby. At about 10.00am the children were instructed to put on their coats, ready to go outside. Their parents/carers and Ms Andrews helped. Some children (and their accompanying adults) were more warmly dressed than others. We all went outside where we took bikes and climbing equipment from the large storage sheds at the back of the play area. The children busily played on slides, swings, a wooden climbing structure, and the sand pit. I chatted with one Mum who told me that she had 5 children. Her two youngest were with her at LiL today. She said that she enjoys it and comes most weeks. One Mum who has a son in the LiL group told me that he is in the process of being tested for Autism. She said that his speech and ability to interact with other children has been improving since he has been attending LiL. I also chatted with a Mum who is a regular at LiL with her toddler son, and baby girl. She said she was feeling very tired today as the baby had been awake during the night and she did not have much sleep. Soon it was time to pack the bikes and balls away and go back inside the LiL room.

When we arrived back in the classroom it was time for fruit. Most of the families had brought some to share. There were apples, strawberries, grapes, and oranges. While everyone was outside Ms Andrews had cut up all the fruit and placed it on a large plastic platter. Most children helped themselves; some used the tongs provided, others used their fingers. Parents helped the smaller children. Everyone sat on the mat with their fruit while Mrs Johnson sat down to read the story 'When I'm Feeling Loved'. First, she spoke about sitting and listening quietly and said that she wanted parents to "set an example" and do the same. As she read the story, Mrs Johnson engaged the children with commentary about how it feels to be loved and asking them questions about who loves them. One child was not sitting still during the story. Instead, he was getting out toys and climbing into the bookcase shelves. His carer

expressed concern about how he would adapt to Kinder. Mrs Johnson reassured her that Kinder is still some time away and that things will be fine.

Next it was time to sing some songs. Staying with the fish themed cutting and pasting activity, the song words to 'One, Two, Three, Four, Five, Once I caught a Fish Alive' were printed out on sheets of paper. Ms Andrews handed these out to everyone. The singing was taken by Mrs Johnson, who used a laptop to project music clips onto the whiteboard at the front of the room. One of the 3-year-olds appeared to love the singing, during which I could hear her little voice very clearly. Finally, there was the 'Goodbye Song', which is always enjoyed by the children, who know all the words. Mrs Johnson told everyone to take home their song sheets and reminded them about the Farm Excursion that was coming up. She stood near the door and said goodbye to everyone as they left.

As one Mum was leaving, Mrs Johnson spoke quietly with her away from everyone else. There had been some problems at home and Mrs Johnson offered to sit down and have a chat. They agreed to catch up soon. A few of the children were very tired and grizzled as they left. Others called out raucous goodbyes to Mrs Johnson and Ms Andrews.

6.2. Theme One: Isolation

6.2.1. Vignette: Tegan

Tegan's vignette depicts aspects of the first key finding from the ethnographic study, 'Isolation'. This theme emerged relatively early in the analysis and was evident for a significant number of participants. Isolation was both geographic and social and had multiple negative effects on the lives of parents and their children.

Tegan is a single Mum who at the time of her first interview was 34 years of age and her three children were aged between 11, 7, and 3 years. The children have contact with their father "sometimes, [but] not very often". Tegan has lived in the area with the children for about 9 years. They currently live in a rental property not too far from the children's school. They have been in this house about 2 years. Tegan says this house is better than the last one as it has electric heating "...I need a heat pump because I find that's better for [daughter]'s asthma than a fireplace". Tegan left

school at the end of Grade Ten and does not have a paid job. Sometimes they are very short of money. Tegan's daughter's asthma means that they make quite a few visits to the doctor. This can be hard to pay for.

Q: *[Have you] got a GP that you see if you're worried...or...*

A: *... I just go to different ones that aren't really going to cost.*

Q: *So, you go to the ones that bulk bill?*

A: *Yes...for the kids I take them out to [a GP clinic on the other side of the city] only because I don't have to pay for the kids. It's only if I get sick, so I try and just let my body fight it...*

I met Tegan at LiL at River Town Primary School where she was taking her youngest daughter Olivia. Tegan loves being a Mum, she says, "the first thing I hear of a morning is "Mum" and I just love it. Although, she does find it stressful being on her own and dealing with the children's more difficult behaviour, especially when they don't listen to her, or they fight with each other. She sometimes finds it hard to know if she is disciplining them in a way that is helpful.

When she needs some support or advice, Tegan usually turns to her Mum. She doesn't like to ask anyone else for help, she has had some bad experiences with people.

...I'm one who doesn't like to ask for help because I feel like, I don't know, sometimes when I have asked for help in previous [times], I've been turned down, so that makes me think, why are they going to help me now?

Sometimes she isn't sure if she can really trust people at services either. Tegan withdraws if she doesn't feel that she is accepted and safe,

I'd go to people I trust and can feel comfortable with talking to, yeah...I feel like if I can actually talk to them without feeling judged or anything and I'll start talking a bit...

At the time of her interviews Tegan did not have a driver's licence or a car, but she did have her learner's licence. She had been paying for lessons for a while, but it became too hard to afford. Finding someone who can go driving with her to accumulate the required 50 hours of practice is difficult. Sometimes her Mum, or her

friend Bianca take her driving, but she has still only accumulated 17 hours so far. She isn't sure how she will be able to afford a car anyway. This means that she needs to live close to services, "...Because I walk everywhere, we've got to be in the surrounds where, [the children can] walk to school." Tegan sometimes uses the bus, but they don't always run at times that suit the family. When they lived at their previous house it was a long walk to school, which was hard when the children were tired or grumpy:

So we'd have to walk all the way down... it would normally take us probably 25-30 minutes easy, if not more...depending on [the children] and if [they] just didn't want to walk and [daughter] was being stubborn...

...[One day]I think it took us almost an hour and [daughter] was like 'I don't want to walk', it's like 'well I'm sorry darling but you have to walk, I can't carry you you've got to walk'

Relying on walking is particularly difficult during the cold and wet days of winter. In their current home the walk it is not so far, but sometimes the weather is still a problem:

...I'm always happy to walk but then if it's heavy rain and [I'm] trying to get the kids to school, that's sort of a bit hard.

Q: Do they ever miss school because of transport?

A: Sometimes

Although Tegan gets help from family and friends with transport it can still be hard to access the services she needs for the children. She tries to make appointments for days when her Mum is available to drive them, but sometimes this doesn't work out and she either needs to reschedule the appointment or get a taxi, which is expensive. If appointments are on the other side of town, it takes two buses to get there, which takes up a lot of the day.

Tegan preferred to take Olivia to the Wednesday LiL group because there were fewer people there. At first, she found going to LiL quite scary and she commented that walking into a room full of people that she didn't know took a lot of courage for her. It helped that the teacher was really friendly and made a point of introducing her to other parents. Tegan feels uncomfortable being around a lot of people, but she does

find that LiL is a supportive environment and that “they don’t judge you or anything”. When they were younger, Tegan also took her other children to LiL. She feels that LiL was helpful in transitioning them into Kindergarten. Tegan thinks that LiL provides children with some of the early education and opportunities, like mixing with other children, that she cannot afford to provide:

... [LiL helps] your kids to socialise... – especially if you don’t have the money to put them in the day care, like me.

Tegan enjoys taking Olivia to LiL because the other parents talk to her, and she feels that LiL brings benefits to both her and Olivia,

It’s good. It’s not just good for [Olivia], it’s good for me. It gets me out. It gives me a chance to meet the Mums and other people... it’s good for [Olivia] as well, to mix in with the other kids and go off and play on her own.

Yeah, and it gets me out of the house...It gets me out doing stuff and spending more of that extra time with her.

Sometimes it is hard for Tegan to connect with other people and with services for her children because of geographic isolation, financial strain, lack of transport, social anxiety and social isolation. Going to LiL has helped Tegan to feel more connected with other parents in her community.

Geographic and social isolation were common themes in the data. This was evident in multiple ways that impacted on families’ abilities and motivation to engage and remain engaged with services. Adding to the challenges that many families experienced with isolation was the recurrent problem of transport disadvantage.

6.2.2. Transport disadvantage

Parents frequently reported that lack of reliable private transport was a significant problem for their family. Stemming from a range of causes, transport difficulties contributed significantly to social and geographic isolation that was experienced by many families in this study. Consistent with other Australian studies (for example Carbone et al. (2004), Cortis et al. (2009), Currie et al. (2007)) transport difficulties restrict families’ abilities to engage with services in a way that is consistent and that will confer the greatest benefits to parents and

children. Lack of transport therefore has a direct influence on children's early childhood education service use. Parents commented:

[My children] were [attending service] for a while, they haven't been in a little bit because the partner lost his licence for three months so it's made it hard getting back and forth so we didn't go for a little bit...and actually they just haven't been back... it's been probably about six months, probably longer...

Q: So you mentioned that you don't drive... so how does that impact on things for you...

A: That's hard. We walk, and my youngest doesn't want to sit in the pram anymore, so we walk or catch the bus or taxi

Transport barriers were notable for participants from both sites however a greater number of River Town participants reported these transport difficulties. For participants in the Distant Hills site however, living in a rural and geographically dispersed location meant that lack of transport was especially problematic and isolating. Highlighting the importance of place-based services in enabling access and participation for families, a parent commented that they used LiL *because* it was close to their home, "I went a couple of times to the [Distant Hills] Primary [LiL group] because I only live up the road from there...". Another Distant Hills parent commented about the CFC,

...for someone like me that has no transport, it makes it a lot easier having it all in the one [location]...I can get everything done, and [son] can have a play. So, it's awesome to have it all here in the one building...

The existing literature clearly shows that when compared with more affluent families, a high number of low-income families experience transport disadvantage (1.3% and 9.9 % respectively) (Rosier and McDonald, 2011). Many participants in this study were sole parents (31%), and all were families residing in outer suburbs or rural Tasmania. These are population groups who are known to experience heightened vulnerability to transport disadvantage (Rosier and McDonald, 2011). Participants who did not drive, or own a reliable vehicle reported walking long distances, using bus or taxi services, and relying on family or friends to drive them to services and appointments.

Dependence on friends, family, or others for transport to LiL, school or other services was widely reported. Numerous participants noted that their lack of private transport dictated their availability for appointments and meant that they needed to plan their children's

activities to align with transport availability. This was often provided by participant's own parents.

...every Wednesday, my Mum comes in, so I always book appointments or anything on a Wednesday.

...my Mum... because she doesn't work... [she] is sort of flexible... so I ask her when an okay time for me would be to make an appointment and then sort of go from there, and work around...

...If there's anything with [son] I've got to do, I'll leave it to a day that Mum's off work...she's always there for the kids. If they need to go to the doctors, it's always Mum that does it because [partner]'s either at his Mum's or off fishing. Or in the shed drinking. So, it's Mum that will take them to the doctors and everything when I need it.

This dependence on others limited parent's ability to attend services with their children, and complicated appointment making with services that often have limited availability or flexibility with bookings. Subsequently, parents may experience a lack of control over their own routines and schedules, restricted agency, and heightened psychosocial distress. These confines have implications for children, and their opportunities for inclusion in activities such as LiL. A common alternative to arranging transport with friends or family is walking, which was a widely reported mode of transport for participants.

6.2.3. Walking

Numerous participants, particularly those in the River Town study site, reported that not having access to a reliable private vehicle necessitated walking as their only means of transport. Whilst walking offers health and cost saving benefits, when it is a parents' primary method of transport it is associated with vulnerabilities, limiting families' ability to access goods, and services (Bostock, 2001: 11). Bostock argues that whilst transport barriers are well recognised, walking is frequently promoted as a positive mode of transport; this view obscures the problems of fatigue and psychosocial stress on parents and children that may arise when walking is the only transport option (Bostock, 2011: 11-12). Additionally, families who are restricted to walking have limited access to resources that are located outside of their local community and can experience compounding stress from being confined to a community that is often under-resourced and neglected (Bostock, 2001).

The cold Tasmanian winter means that families who are dependent on walking for transport sometimes miss appointments, school, or LiL. The practicalities of keeping children dry and warm in wet weather add an additional consideration for parents not generally experienced by families with their own car. As explained by two participants:

...I mean if it's only raining like a shower, I'm always happy to walk but then if it's heavy rain and trying to get the kids to school, that's sort of a bit hard... As long as I can get them up here and get them home, that's the main thing because at least when they're home they can have a shower... I still got [youngest] but then I always put on a coat on [her] and then she's all right. When we get home, I know to put them all in the bath... I try not to let that worry me.

Q: And, you haven't been to Launching into Learning with [son]...?

A: No, I've been meaning to get him up there for the last few months, and every time I organise it, the transport falls through. And, I don't live far from there, but on a rainy, icy day, and because it's held in the mornings, it's yeah...

This is a significant issue, and one that is more than mere inconvenience for parents. When weather means that children are unable to walk to school, they miss valuable exposure to learning opportunities. This was well understood by one LiL teacher who noted that LiL attendance is reduced on wet days, particularly during the cold winter months. In communities affected by low socioeconomic status and where children experience higher rates of developmental disadvantage that their wealthier peers (Lamb et al., 2015) missed days of school or LiL are particularly problematic and may act to perpetuate ingrained social disadvantage. This problem is compounded by the fact that children living in disadvantaged conditions tend to suffer from more frequent illnesses and chronic health issues such as asthma (Kozyrskyj et al., 2010), adding to days of missed school or LiL. This was reflected in the study data with many participants reporting that their children suffered from ongoing health concerns, particularly concerns related to asthma.

A further transport related barrier that families with a low income sometimes face is the precariousness of their own transport. One participant talked about the need to plan for times when the family car was broken down (by living within walking distance from the children's schools), and of the difficulties in paying for repairs when needed.

...if your car's off the road I like to be in walking distance still... While I've got a car it's not always... it's going to be off the road. And if you haven't got the money to fix it then [the children are] missing out on a couple of weeks of school

Another participant explained that their child had not been able to attend LiL due to the family car breaking down:

...I want to get him into [LiL], but because I've blown the car up, I'm back to square one again. So, transport's always the issue living out here without a car...

It is evident then, that for low income families, car ownership does not in itself confer certainty that they can access services in an ongoing and consistent way.

Not having private transport, or the experience of transport difficulties sometimes dictated which specific services and service locations with which families could engage. This means that some families were only able to access services located in their immediate, local area. Subsequently, if a parent is uncomfortable, or does not want to engage with a particular service site or provider, their opportunities to attend other sites are constrained. The result of this is that they may disengage from the program. Conversely, parents with reliable private transport can more readily choose to travel 'out-of-area' to alternative LiL sites. This was seen in the accounts of some participants. One parent for example, talked about her decision to travel 20-25 minutes across town, to continue accessing the same LiL group, after moving homes:

A: ...Hopefully, we'll be able to stay.

Q: You want to stay at this school?

A: Yes.

Q: You'll be moving to the other side of town in a way. Can you tell me a bit about why it's important for you to stay here?

A: I just like the teachers... It's not excluding or anything. You always feel welcome... The kids like it too.

Transport then confers numerous social advantages to families and reduces isolation. The absence of reliable, ongoing, and independent private transport isolates families and constrains parent's capacity to respond to children's needs and consistently engage with services. This means that children may not receive interventions and support, or that they are delayed, potentially jeopardising health and development, deepening, and reproducing their disadvantage. This represents a systemic barrier to inclusion that is imbedded in the

design of LiL, and education more broadly. Having reliable private transport tended to give families greater choice and flexibility in how they engaged with LiL.

6.2.4. Isolation as a single parent

The experience of raising children as a single parent was a further isolating factor observed in this study. Single parents comprised 31% of the participants in this study. Raising children alone is strongly associated with poverty and reduced life chances (Phillips et al., 2013).

When asked ‘what is hard about being a parent?’, a common response from unpartnered participants in this study was related to managing children’s challenging behaviour and ‘being alone’:

Q: What’s hard about being a parent?

A: When they don’t listen to you, and just being on your own sometimes...

A: Their behaviours, trying to – and as they grow you’ve got to try and work out new ways of like with disciplining...Yeah, especially when you’ve done it on your own and that. It’s more of a challenge...

A: ...to start off with having the two of them and being a single Mum, things were a little bit hard

One participant was raising two children alone, one of whom was autistic. They did not feel well connected to support networks and were finding it difficult to cope with their child’s behaviour,

Q: ...what's it like for you, managing those things with [child] by yourself?

A: Hard at times. Very hard at times.

Q:... are you getting any support from anywhere?

A: Not really...

Further highlighting the isolation of some participants, several parents remarked during interviews that they did not have friends in their community that they could trust:

Q: Do you know many other young families around where you live?

A: Not really; there's only two others I know that live virtually across the road and that's it. I normally just keep to myself.

Q: [Do] your friends...drive?

A: No... I don't have any [friends]. So, I can't really say.

It can be seen then, that while a common thread between study participants was the experience of isolation, this was a heightened concern for lone parents who tended be particularly detached from social and community networks of support. This detachment connects to a further recurrent theme in the data, of parents need to 'get out of the house' and to connect with other parents.

6.2.5. Getting out of the house, overcoming social isolation

The need to 'get out of the house' is not exclusive to lower income families, however as discussed in relation to transport, the opportunities available for them to do so may be more limited. LiL represents a chance to get out of the house that is relatively close to home, is free, and where parents can spend time in the company of other adults, whilst their children engage in safe, positive learning activities and play. For both partnered and unpartnered parents, LiL was a way to overcome social isolation. Parents frequently spoke about LiL as an opportunity to connect with other families. When asked about their experiences of LiL, parents' responses commonly referred to the ways that LiL helps address their need for social interaction.

... It's really good, they get you talking to other people. Even the out and about like when we go to stuff you're on a bus with people, you get chatting and then you go to the park and you just get chatting to other people. I don't have a lot of friends, I don't have time for friends, I'm not a friend person...I don't even go and visit my sister... So playgroup is probably awesome because I get to have adult conversations...

... sometimes you just get too much in your head, you're sitting at home...because there's nothing else really to do. But when there's a LiL, then you can sort of go out and you can take a moment, and you love your kids, but when you're at home, they're just Mum, Mum, Mum, Mum, so it's nice to be able to get out and sit with some other Mums and talk to them...

Parents widely recognised the importance of LiL for socialisation, not only for themselves, but also their children.

...she's made lots of friends...I think that's helped her, especially with pre-kinder...

[LiL] helps you and your kids to get you out of the house...It's better than being stuck at home...[otherwise] you're stuck in there. [Son] likes to do different things... I think

they get bored sitting at home all the time. They like to get out of the house and do different things and see other people...

However, not all parents in the study viewed LiL as a social outlet, and some parents expressed feeling anxious or shy about engaging with others.

I'm shy, so I just stick to myself... Yeah, if they talk to me, I'll talk back, but I usually just stay on my own.

...if there was someone I knew that went – I would be more inclined to go, because I do get nervy about seeing people I don't know. I get anxiety... I think that's probably what stops me most of the time...I do fight it, because I've got to try to do it for my kids...

I was encouraged by a friend who was using [LiL]. Because my first was in Kindergarten at the time and the teachers would come on and say, "Oh, you should bring him, you should bring him." And there was still that anxiety of new people and new faces and new settings and, you know, I don't like feeling like an odd one out, that sort of thing, being judged. But when I went along with my friend, that was it. I was hooked pretty quickly.

This anxiety was acknowledged by LiL teachers, who also recognised that families can be apprehensive about being judged:

... I say to [parents], "I understand it could be really hard to come in for the first time." But we've tried to make our [group]...so that they are really welcoming and friendly...

...what I was saying about schools before, that [parents] can see a place and think they're just going to judge me...And that can be confronting to people... maybe they haven't had the best experiences in the past...

Isolation then, has broad ranging impacts on the ways that families engage with LiL.

Connected to isolation, is capital. The next section presents ways that Bourdieu's capitals are linked to isolation and influence how families experience and engage with LiL.

6.2.6. Social capital

Low economic capital and the often-resultant effect of social and geographic isolation means that families may find it difficult to accumulate social capital. Social capital is that which is accumulated through resources that individuals can utilise from outside their immediate family, including social networks and relationships. These networks and

relationships from outside the family can confer opportunities for individuals to expand their resources in ways that provide tangible or symbolic benefits (Bourdieu, 1986). For many families in this study, opportunities to build social capital were restricted. This was largely due to the experience of social and/or geographic isolation. As explained by two participants:

...when we moved to [town] it was a bit more awkward [to attend LiL] because of where we were, and it cost a fortune...So that was something we had to be careful of...the amount of trips...because it was quite costly

Q: ...what impact do you think...that physical distance and travel impact has had for you?

A: You feel like you miss out on a bit because of the travel. ...I know it was an issue when [eldest child] was little, she was nearly three before she socialized with other people because it was so far away

...where we live, you don't actually get to associate with many people...So coming to LiL is a chance for the kids to play with other people. You get to talk to the teachers...and mainly just talking to other parents. You think in the end, 'oh my house is normal then', because their house is just the same. It's good for the kids and it's good for the parents, too, to have a little chat.

As indicated, the prospects of developing advantageous social relationships were constrained for many families who were both socially and geographically cut-off from the broader community. Additionally, living in a community with a high concentration of families experiencing economic disadvantage families can amplify the experience of isolation due to associated problems with anti-social behavior and crime. As noted by participants,

We have...drug dealers. We have police in the street at least twice, if not three times a week. We had a fire in the street. We have motorbikes that hoon up the street

... [Neighbouring suburb] has gotten pretty bad... If you stick to yourself, I don't think you'd have any problems...I think if you stick to the one area you feel safer for your kids. I worry when my kids want go for a walk...

Q: Do you know many other young families around where you live?

A: Not really. There's only two others I know that live virtually across the road and that's it. I normally just keep to myself...

The experience of ‘keeping to myself’ and the reduced opportunities to accumulate social capital can act to magnify the effects of isolation through reduced access to resources. In this study, geographic isolation often meant that parents had reduced contact with other parents of young children, deepening their experience of social isolation. For example, this limited families’ opportunities to socialise, share information and parenting experiences, and garner parenting support. As noted earlier, parents sometimes remarked that they did not have many friends or social resources:

I don't have a lot of friends... I'm not a friend person, I don't go visiting people... I don't even go and visit my sister...

Low resources of social capital can also help to explain why some parents reported that their eldest child/ren did not attend LiL. Despite efforts by schools to promote LiL through a variety of means including word-of-mouth, pamphlets and social media, parents frequently reported that when their first child was eligible to attend, they had not been aware what LiL was, or that it was available to them. Some parents had been aware of “Pre-Kinder” programs that were available in the year prior to Kindergarten, but they did not know that LiL offered programs for children from birth. The way that social capital can function to facilitate contact with LiL is evidenced below:

A: Yeah, well, I didn't really know about [LiL]... I found out, at the end of last year...when [eldest child] was still Pre-Kinder... so I started to bring the [younger children] ...

Q: So, you knew about pre-kinder?

A: Yeah, I got told about it halfway through last year, so [child] missed out quite a bit of it, but I brought her once... I think my sister asked me if [my daughter] was going [to pre-kinder] and then that's when I found out

I came down, it was about halfway through last year to enrol, getting enrolment forms for [daughter] for kinder, and they let me know about [LiL]... So then the next day, she was down here and we were starting it, and we've been coming to it since... I wish I'd known about Launching into Learning earlier so [eldest] could've enjoyed it longer.

Similarly, other parents reported that they only learned about LiL at the school when their eldest child commenced formal schooling in Kindergarten.

... there are a lot of parents who are around who don't know about [LiL] unless their child goes to the school...

I started coming here with my second child actually, so when my eldest one started kinder I got along with the teacher really well...with my first child, I didn't know there was anything like this available for the kids, so once my [son], he came to school, found all this information out, and that's when we started using [LiL]. So I started with my second child, two days a week we used to come, and then we just sort of kept it going.

Q: When [daughter] was little was Launching into Learning available here?

A: It was available, but I actually didn't know, nobody had ever said anything to me about it so I didn't know about it. It wasn't until last year when she started Kinder, I found out... and then I'm like well I actually didn't know.

These examples highlight the connecting role that 'other people' (social contacts or social capital) can have in supporting initial connections between families and LiL. Subsequently, those families with greater social capital resources may have been more likely to have known about LiL, and consequently participated in the program.

Correspondingly, regular LiL attendees reported that their social contacts (potential social capital) were expanded through their participation in the program:

So, we actually met a couple of families...and they had their little kid there playing, and we had a lovely old chat just about - like with the common ground, kids. You know, what are your kids [like] and how old are they...

Since I've been here, I've been talking to a hell of a lot more of the mothers now, where before I just used to stay to myself.

...the kids love it like (son) gets so excited when we go on a school trip because he gets so excited to go on the bus. And (older son) was the same...he'd get so excited over the bus trip. And they just love it. Because they don't have a lot to do with kids their age so when they can come to playgroup and play with kids their age it's awesome...

Families who were well connected with LiL commented that they received social support (building and leveraging social capital) through their relationships at the school. The benefits of this were multiple and help to ameliorate some of the difficulties of isolation.

Q: Where do you get the most help or support as a parent?

A: Probably school actually; like [teacher] is great at [LiL]. If I've got an issue with [child] I can talk to her about it. Same with [worker at LiL]. All my family lives on the mainland... We don't have a lot to do with my husband's family... Yeah, I really only come to school to do things.

Q: ... if you'd had concerns would you have spoken to the [Lil] teachers about it?

A: Yeah, I would have spoken to them. They're all pretty approachable people. They seem to know which direction to point you in with anything, which is good...

This social support builds families' social capital and helps to overcome isolation, increasing opportunities for parents and children to acquire greater resources of dominant forms of cultural capital.

6.2.7. Economic capital

Economic capital was a powerful determinant of participants' experiences of isolation. Most participants were unemployed or had only one member of their household in paid employment. Reduced economic capital meant families experienced a range of overlapping barriers to social participation. Low incomes meant that the families in this study predominantly lived in public housing, or low-cost rental properties. In common with many lower SES communities, the River Town site is located on the fringes of a regional city. The outer-lying areas of the community have access to a community house, churches, and a fish and chip shop. However, there are no essential services such as a supermarket, early childhood health centre, doctors' surgery, or school. This means that many families were not able to access these services close to their home. As evidenced earlier, this lack of place-based services is compounded for families who are not able to afford a family car.

Q: ...you mentioned that you don't drive...

A: I just haven't been able to afford to get my licence

Q: ...[does] it ever stop you from accessing a service, not driving, or not being able to get there?

A: Yeah, it has...

I do have a lot of friends that would find it difficult, because they don't drive and so they rely on buses and friends and things, but yeah, it would be hard. It would be hard for people in the suburb if they didn't drive to access health care, especially child health.

As discussed at the beginning of this chapter, numerous families in this study were experiencing transport disadvantage, primarily due to having constrained economic

resources. Inadequate economic capital can result in parents feeling geographically and socially isolated from the community.

6.2.8. Cultural capital

For Bourdieu, cultural capital is primarily imparted to individuals in the home, family, and social environment (Reay, 2004). It often accumulates unconsciously and sets the foundation for how actors interact, understand and interpret their world and the social settings they encounter (Bourdieu, 1986). Despite its foundations in the home, cultural capital is continuously acquired in response to experiences throughout the lifespan and is imparted via both implicit and explicit means. When families are socially isolated however, their opportunities to build upon the cultural capital of their family are constrained. This has the potential to underscore a significant barrier to participation and social equity.

Importantly, Bourdieu (1986: 17) argues that cultural capital has a central role in academic achievement and subsequent life trajectories. Isolation therefore constrains families' opportunities to develop more dominant forms of cultural capital which are the form that can facilitate smooth transitions into and through the school environment.

During formal and informal interviews, Kindergarten teachers commented that there was a marked difference between children who had attended LiL, and those who had not. Whilst school readiness encompasses multiple areas of children's development, cultural capital and the expectation of what children should be able to 'do' is one important aspect of being school ready. These aptitudes are often created or supported through the acquisition of socially dominant forms of cultural capital. Teachers reported that children who had not participated in the LiL program, were less likely to be 'ready for school',

... the families that are engaged in pre-kinder, they were ready, and [another teacher] found that as well... she could tell clearly who had attended and who hadn't. So the percentage of kids that came from pre-kinder were ready... Language skills. Toileting...being able to be independent. Being able to do things like carry their own bag in, take their own jumper off...it's that basic stuff that you would assume that they would come in with... So typically, our Kindergarten development check data looks pretty woeful

Families who were regular attenders of LiL however, reported that the sessions had helped their children to learn the routines and expectations of the school setting. This can be thought of as a form of cultural capital:

I think the LiL programs...are very important, because when the kids start Kinder and school...a lot of the things they're doing are exactly what they've been used to doing...I've heard the teachers say "...the Kinder group's going to be doing [activity] the next day", and so on.

...my second one, he was a bit more reserved, he wasn't as social, he didn't make friends as easy, and with going to LiL... it helped him communicate between himself and the teacher...we always told him that it was the teacher, so that he could have his mind ready sort of, for school.

Because a lot of the time, kids going to kinder, it's really chucking them in the deep end if they don't learn beforehand...

...listening...and following instructions and things like that which is what LiL is good for too, that she can sit down on the mat and I think that's really helped her, because I didn't actually think that she would ever go to sit down on the mat and listen to a teacher...

Parents valued the way that LiL attendance supported their children in becoming familiar with the routines and expectations of school. Moreover, comments from teachers also indicated that LiL operates to support the accumulation of cultural capital in both parents and carers. Whilst this was not overtly stated as a goal of LiL, it was evident that techniques of 'modelling' and explicit teaching were used to impart the kinds of knowledges needed for children and their parents to 'fit in' and successfully transition into school life. Teachers or support workers were often observed interacting with children to intentionally impart the knowledges (or rules of play) of the school (field). As recorded in my fieldnotes (River Town):

[One child in the group] often seems to be a little challenging in LiL. He often doesn't want to sit on the mat, can be noisy and a little "naughty". [Teacher] has told me previously that she has sought permission from the Mum to step in and intervene if his behaviour is challenging. The TA asked him on a couple of occasions during the mat time to sit with his legs crossed. She physically moved his legs into a crossed position, referring to them as "kinder legs"

[Two little girls] were tickling each other and playing. The TA told one of them to stop because 'at school the rules are that we keep our hands to ourselves- we don't touch other people'...

This training provided to children was often explicit, recognised, and usually appreciated by parents. One mother noted that teachers work towards teaching children the expected behaviours of school,

...he still might just stand up and look at the book while everyone else is sitting on the mat, and they encourage him to sit down... he's picking up those ideas that that's what we do as a group, generally in that environment as well... So I think it definitely, definitely helps with that sort of thing which is great because it's a very different environment to at home

Similarly, parents were also the recipients of teaching:

When [teacher] held up the book she was going to read, one of the children who had also been at LiL yesterday said that they had heard the story yesterday. [Teacher] explained [to the parents] that this is a good thing... [and] that when children have a favourite book that they want to hear over and over, not to get frustrated, because repetition helps children learn to read. She then spoke [to the children] about sitting and listening quietly, and that she wanted parents to "set an example" and do the same. Modelling and teaching parents is a strong focus in this room...

There is a 6-week music activity coming up at LiL. It is an off-site activity that the school takes the families to, on a bus each week. When [teacher] was telling parents about the activity, she instructed parents that she welcomed everyone to sign up for the program, but that if they do sign up that they needed to realise they were making a commitment. She said that they need to honour that commitment by attending every week because it is very difficult for organisers when people sign up for things but then do not attend. She said something along the lines of "when we say we are going to do something, then it is important that we do them". I see this as an example of LiL being a place in which parents are also "taught".

These early experiences in the school environment may help children to better maximise their 'profits' (Bourdieu, 1986) from education by training them and their parents in the 'rules of play'.

Isolation presents significant and overlapping barriers to engagement in LiL for many families in this study. Families were predominantly living in communities with very few services located close by. Low economic resources often underpinned difficulties with transport, and constrained the ability of parents to 'get out of the house'. This presented challenges for the acquisition of social and cultural capital, and regular attendance at LiL. Theme Two: Complex Lives intersects with Isolation, and further illuminates families' experiences and the ways that they use LiL.

6.3. Theme Two: Complex Lives

6.3.1. Vignette: Stacey

Stacey is a 26-year-old single Mum of two children, Brad who is 5, and Sascha aged 2.

Stacey finished her schooling at the end of Grade Ten and has not been in paid employment during the last 6 years.

Stacey lives about 15 minutes' walk from the local Primary School. This year, Brad started Prep, and Sascha attends LiL once a week. Brad went to LiL for a few sessions, and then Pre- Kinder a couple of times.

Stacey does not live with Brad and Sascha's father Darren anymore, as things didn't work out between them. Darren rents a small flat in another suburb, about 10 minutes' drive from their home. There have been periods of intense conflict between Stacey and Darren. Things are ok at the moment, but this seems to change quickly. This is stressful for Stacey and well as the children. There have been issues in the past that resulted in Child Safety becoming involved. For a while, Darren visited the children at a contact center, but he didn't always turn up. Stacey thinks he is drinking a lot, or maybe using some other drugs.

Stacey says the house she lives in with the children is adequate, but she feels very unsafe in the street:

We have 12 drug dealers. We have police in the street at least twice, if not three times a week. We had a fire in the street. We have motorbikes that hoon up the street...it's a horrible street

She would like to move into a different street where things are quieter, and less stressful, but finding a house she can afford to rent is difficult because:

...there's nothing around... [and] because I don't drive I have to walk everywhere, so we've got to be in the surrounds where, [the children] will walk to school

Due to the costs involved, Stacey hasn't got a driver's license, so when she needs transport, her Mum helps,

...she's always there for the kids. If they need to go to the doctors...it's Mum that does it because [Darren] is...drinking. So, it's Mum that will take them to the doctors and everything when I need it

There can be a lot of appointments for the children because Sascha gets asthma and eczema quite badly. Sometimes Sascha has asthma attacks during the night and needs to go to the hospital. Getting there can difficult, and the unpredictable nature

of Sascha's asthma means that it can interrupt their routine and Brad doesn't get to school. Brad has been having some problems with his speech and this had made his behaviour a challenge for Stacey...

because people didn't understand him, so he got frustrated a lot, his behaviour – he didn't know how to handle not being understood and that, so he just had really – yeah, frustration and everything all in one. And I could not actually handle him...

However, Stacey has noticed an improvement in Brad's speech and behaviour since he has been getting extra help through the school.

I had no idea what he was on about... he'd throw himself on the floor, he'd kick and it was hard, and it was heartbreaking. Some days I'd just cry. It's like, 'I don't know what you want'. And so now I can understand him more and I can just respond to him straight away...

Stacey's Mum is also having some health problems, and so sometimes she isn't well enough to take Stacey places, or she is busy with her own medical appointments. This has meant that Stacey has needed to cancel some appointments.

Finances are tight for Stacey, and this limits their opportunities to participate in activities for the children:

just not a lot to do with the kids around the community, and you struggle at times...finding things to do and financially at times, you have those days where you just - yeah...we find it a little bit hard at the moment...

Stacey and the children enjoy LiL, but when she first started taking the children to LiL Stacey felt very anxious about it. It took a big effort for her to overcome her nerves and go along,

Because once upon a time I wouldn't have done it. I would have just stayed home, or I wouldn't have went ...I'm not one to come to groups a lot because I don't like mixing in with people but once I got here, I was all right.

When they first started going to LiL Stacey was worried about Brad having tantrums in front of everyone,

...it does get a little bit embarrassing...But it was good to know... they understood that these things happen, and kids are just kids, and they get upset over the smallest things...

Stacey understands that her children benefit from their use of LiL, but sometimes her life gets very difficult and there are a lot of problems to deal with. This makes it hard for her to engage consistently with LiL. It is important to Stacey that when she goes to places for the children, that the staff are friendly and non-judgemental.

This vignette incorporates quotes from seven parent participants from both primary research sites.

6.3.2. Complex lives

Stacey's story was not unique in this study. The lives of numerous participant's families could be described as complex. Many families in the study were experiencing multiple stressors and competing issues which made it difficult to prioritise children's early education (Dockett, 2011). Numerous families were living with multiple and ongoing issues related to children's disabilities or chronic health complaints. The intense stress managing this was expressed by the mother of a child with a learning disorder:

...to be at home with a little boy that I didn't know how to make happy - sometimes, I just felt like oh my God, what have I done? How can I just not make anything right for this little boy? It was – God... his sensory issues. He will only wear soft touch clothing. So, if I had something with a button on him or a cord that was touching him in the wrong way or if he had a seam in his sock - you know... I could not get so much as a little bit [of food] on the side of his mouth. It would be the end of days...the obsession would be to the mess. Then it would be 'wipe it, wipe it, wipe it'. He'd completely forget about eating because he was so wrapped up in this sticky, sensory sort of overload. So that was the hard part.

Other parents were coping with their own health problems, inadequate or inappropriate housing, economic stress, illicit drug or alcohol abuse, emotional and or physical abuse, unemployment, criminal activity and incarceration, relationship breakdown, lack of transport.

One mother spoke to me about her situation, as recorded in my Fieldnotes:

We conducted the interview. After the recording stopped [participant] told me some more detail about her life. The Dad of her kids is in prison. She is worried about how his impending release will impact on the children and she does not feel safe...the children have witnessed him 'bashing' his current partner, and their drug use.

The difficulties faced by some families was acknowledged by a LiL teacher:

Look the families, obviously, they suffer from poverty, trauma, there's drug addictions, domestic violence, and research shows in a lower socioeconomic area, unfortunately, that's what happens within that community...

And another LiL teacher:

I did have a Dad at the beginning of the year who engaged, but then he disengaged because he had lots going on in his life and I think he found it a real challenge. He was trying to cope with so much...

Such complexity means that families can find managing the day-to-day activities of living particularly stressful. Although they recognised the value of LiL, complexity influences their ability to attend and maintain engagement with LiL.

6.3.3. Focus on immediate concerns

Chronic stress or complexity can make it difficult for parents to devote time and attention to the more long-term concerns of children's learning. Instead, much of their time, economic, and emotional resources are taken up with making sure that children are fed, bills are paid, and that housing is secure. Further, dealing with family conflict, health appointments and transport issues take up additional resources. Consistent with the work of others (see for example Centre for Community Child Health (2010, 2), Knaus et al. (2016), Stern et al. (2015)) the demands of daily 'survival' can subsume the desire to attend early childhood services, making consistent service engagement challenging. Often this means not having any engagement with more 'optional' services such as LiL. Participant 'Sarah', a mother of three, provided an example of this, reporting that her eldest child did not go to LiL because she had been in a violent relationship during the years that her daughter could have attended. Sarah had been under intense strain and had spent a period living in a women's shelter before the service found her a new home, which was a long way from town. She commented that her circumstances were such that she had been unaware of LiL, but that had she known about it, she still would not have been able to access the service due to her family circumstances as well as transport barriers.

Another parent who had been described by the school as 'unengaged' was experiencing multiple complexities, including having a child with serious health issues. This mother spoke about the need to prioritise her children's health over their educational development. Whilst she was aware that teachers were worried about aspects of her child's development, she did not feel that she could address their concerns,

... my [child's] health was more important than education at the time...

This was not the case for all families, however. For some, engagement with LiL acted as a buffer during times of tumult:

Q: Where do you get the most help or support as a parent?

A: Probably school actually... [teacher] is great in playgroup, if I've got an issue with [child] I can talk to her about it...All my family lives on the mainland...We don't have a lot to do with my husband's family... Yeah, I really only come to school...

This seemed particularly true for those who were well connected with a service before difficulties arose.

Another participant, Kelly was dealing with high level personal stress during the time of her participation in the study. She was experiencing economic challenges and was concerned that one of her children was experiencing sexual abuse at the hands of their father. These issues were having a negative impact on Kelly's wellbeing, and that of her two children. Kelly felt comfortable speaking about her problems with staff at LiL and saw the services she used as an importance source of support. On one occasion during the data collection period, I spoke with Kelly at a community children's activity. She was highly distressed, and even though her children were not with her at the time, she attended the event to be around people she knew, and to speak with the service providers about what was happening. Whilst some parents were very comfortable to receive support at LiL, others were less at ease. Some parents reported feeling very anxious about attending LiL.

6.3.4. Social anxiety

Numerous parents spoke of feeling nervous or anxious about attending LiL and participating in group-based activities. As commented by three participants:

...it's more the crowd of people... I just can't deal with it. I get short of breath and I start having panic attacks and it's just like I need to get out of here. So I avoided [LiL]

... I didn't have the confidence. It was a confidence thing, and an anxiety thing...the idea of doing new things and going to new places and meeting new people and being judged and all that sort of stuff as a young Mum, was too overwhelming. And so we just didn't.

Q: ... How did you find it going in there [LiL] for the first time?

A: A bit nerve wracking. I'm not that great at meeting new people...

When asked whether anxiety was a prevalent issue with families at the school, a LiL teacher responded,

Within our school community it is...[and] you'll hear parents say, even in relation to trying to get [children] to pre-kinder, "...they're really anxious and I can't get them in. They've got anxiety..." , I'm also thinking that [stress] and what they deal with has a really big impact on their children's confidence and so forth... for [families], they're dealing with so many of their own issues...

For families who had developed trusting relationships with teachers however, LiL gave much needed and valued support that helped to ameliorate experiences of anxiety and stress;

For some other families it is [being] that person to listen...some [parents] don't have support around them... there can be lots of difficulties that they're experiencing. Sometimes you might need to refer them on to other services as well... I have said to families "I'm here to help. I'm here to support you"...

In common with previous studies nationally and internationally (see for example Gerlach et al. (2017), Roberts (2017)) trust was an important factor in how families engaged with LiL. An inherent unease or lack of trust amongst families became apparent to me during the process of seeking to interview one participant, as recorded in the below Fieldnote (River Town):

Visited [school] pre-k today to meet with [participant]. I went last week to meet with her, and as I had never met her before, I did not know exactly who I was looking for. I asked around amongst the parents who were waiting outside the classroom...and no one seemed to know her. I was unable to find her.

I did the same today, and again, nobody said they knew who she was. A bit later I saw a young Mum, her partner, and their children come in. She was taken aside by one of the other parents who was there both weeks and had heard me asking after [the participant]. They then came out from the classroom to the hall area where I was waiting with some other Mums, looked at me and went back into the classroom.

It turned out that this was [participant] and her friend. I thought it was interesting that her friend had watched me looking for [participant] two weeks in a row and said nothing...I assume that as the friend did not know me, she was not willing to say she knew the person I was looking for. She may have felt suspicious about what I wanted- perhaps even thought I was from [child protection] or similar. [Participant's] partner has spent time in prison and perhaps they have had some negative contact with authorities and thought that I was a threat. Their first feeling towards me seemed to be suspicion.

Throughout the study it was consistently evident that trust was important at LiL and that it often shaped if, and how, parents engaged with LiL. Trust (or absence of trust) therefore, functioned to either ameliorate, or exacerbate the experience of isolation for families. Trust influenced whether families saw LiL as a place where they were safe asking for help, or if it was seen as a place where they needed to be cautious. As one parent commented,

...people - they don't feel comfortable [asking for help]... they feel if they go and talk to the school about their kid's problems or anything, the doctors or anything, they'll go ring welfare...It would be nice if there was a service out there what can actually - what could actually help without turning them into [protective services] - we all make mistakes, we all have our slip-ups, but some of us need help more than others.

Parents who had developed trusting relationships with teachers, school staff, and other families at LiL were, overall, less socially isolated, than those who remained wary of service and service providers. There was a perception for some that asking for support might be viewed as a parenting failure by teachers, who parents recognised as being in positions of power. This distrust amplified the experience of isolation. Parents who were identified as 'less engaged' by teachers were often those who were experiencing high levels of social isolation and reported a preference to 'keep to myself'. These parents tended to keep any concerns about their children or other matters, within their immediate family.

Q: So, when you need help, because every parent needs help from time to time, or advice, where do you normally go? Who would you go to?

A: Mum and Dad.

Teachers recognised the importance of trust. At River Town this was particularly evident on my first visit.

10/8/2017

[The] Principal next took me to the LiL room and introduced me to the teacher who was very welcoming and seemed happy to have me there. There were two Mums and three children already in the room. She introduced me, telling them where I was from and that "it is nothing to worry about". She made a point of telling each mother that my presence was nothing to worry about. She explained later that she did this because parents in the school can be very cautious of new people and they needed to know that I was a safe person.

This lack of trust, as well as a preference for keeping problems within the family, can limit the capacity of LiL to provide help. Support may be offered but not accepted, and teachers

may be unaware of what is needed to best support families due to parents' unwillingness to disclose. These barriers make meaningful engagement difficult for families.

6.3.5. Barriers to connection

When families attend LiL or other early childhood services, stressors can make it difficult for some to form meaningful connections with teachers and other service providers. This means that when they are at LiL, parents may be distracted from the early childhood educational goals of a service. Teachers sometimes commented that parents were preoccupied with their mobile telephones. The classrooms I visited usually had a "no phone zone" sign in at least one prominent position. Occasionally, teachers became frustrated by parents ignoring this, and asked parents to put their telephones away in a 'general announcement' so as not to target anyone specific. In River Town parents were often taking and making telephone calls, text messaging, or talking through issues with other parents or service staff. These communications often seemed to be problem focussed and reflected the ways that difficulties can take up parents' attentional resources and energies.

Another barrier to service engagement, also consistent with previous research (see for example Dockett (2011)) was that parents sometimes expressed concern about their children's behaviour at LiL. Whilst this concern is unlikely to be exclusive to families with more complex needs, this anxiety may add a further stress for parents that acts as a barrier to engagement. As noted by 'Stacey' above, the way that service providers and other service users respond to children's behaviour can affect their ongoing engagement. This was evidenced in the experience of a new family to LiL. As recorded in Fieldnotes (River Town):

It was hard to hear the story at times as some of the children were restless and there was quite a lot happening in the room... The new boy at LiL today did not want to sit on the mat for the story and kept going to get toys out to play with. The teacher aide stepped in a few times, picking him up, taking toys from him and seating him on the mat... At times he became noisy and protested about being made to sit. His mother intervened at times, but at other times let him go and play. I spoke to the TA after LiL...She felt it was important to intervene so that the other children didn't follow his behaviour...

These events drew quite a lot of attention to the child and his mother who appeared uncomfortable and unsure about what she should do. Pointing to the way that feeling welcome and at ease are important to ongoing engagement, this parent did not return to LiL during the data collection period.

6.3.6. Complexity and long-term engagement

It makes sense then, that parents who are facing competing stressors may find engaging with services overwhelming (Friars and Mellor, 2009). Families who are living with complex needs are less likely to engage with services and are more likely to discontinue their contact with services over time (Snell-Johns et al., 2004). It is clear that engagement with services is negatively impacted by complexity. This is recognised by teachers who participated in the study, who were often actively engaged in supporting families through a range of personal and family difficulties.

...for lots of our families that we're dealing with, I mean obviously we're in a very low socioeconomic area. We don't know what some of these families may be dealing with or may be going through...

...working alongside the families can also mean sometimes that a family may have come in, that's got something extremely traumatic or upsetting that's happening in their family. So their first port of call, before they can actually do anything, is actually to have a one on one conversation just to let me know what's happening...

Teachers at both primary sites referred to the difficulties families live with. Complexity was a pervasive theme in informal and formal conversations I had with school staff. This was recorded in a fieldnote from an informal interview with two early childhood teachers (River Town:

...They discussed the fact that much of their work involves dealing with children not being adequately prepared for school- not dressed appropriately, being very dirty and not fed. They mentioned that many of the children at the school have complex home lives, parents with mental health issues and...are struggling to cope. This means that children [may] arrive at school not ready to learn.

Compounding this, numerous parents were raising their children without the support of a spouse or were experiencing violence or other pressures related to their partners or former partners. A teacher commented,

The family violence. We hear all the time about domestic violence and how prevalent that is, but you don't see it. How often do you see those ads on TV, but you don't actually see it. Whereas we see it...

Q: *You see acts of family violence happening at school?*

A: *Yes. Yes...[or violence has]occurred for them in their home that morning, or the night before, so they present at school completely dishevelled and distraught,*

because that's occurred for them, so we are the first people they see after that incident's happened.

These family circumstances had a profoundly negative impact on parents' ability to actively engage with their children's early learning. For some parents in the study, complexity compounded barriers to service engagement in ways that reduced the ability and motivation to access services. This was most apparent amongst participants who were considered 'less engaged' with LiL.

Some families were able to engage with the LiL program through home visits from teachers. These families were often living with specific barriers to in-school LiL engagement (such as illness, family crisis, or anxiety about attending). Teachers tended to view home visits as a short-term way to help families transition into on site LiL or Kindergarten activities, and time constraints meant that this way of engaging with families was limited.

Complex life circumstances were connected to families' resources of capital, and many families were living with multiple and overlapping challenges that acted to create lives of successive difficulties and stressors. Low economic capital compounded this and meant that families lives were made more complex, and therefore more stressful.

6.3.7. Economic capital

For families who were without their own car, the day-to-day tasks of getting children to and from school, attending appointments, or grocery shopping are made significantly more difficult by the need to negotiate alternative ways of transport. As recorded in my fieldnotes, this often meant arranging for other family members to drive them, walking to buses (sometimes needing to transfer to a second bus in the city), or walking long distances with children (in often cold or inclement weather).

Reflecting this, and the impact of economic hardship, one Kindergarten teacher in the study reported that economic disadvantage meant that families' lives were made difficult by a lack of 'basic' resources:

Things like the amount of families out here that don't have electricity or that don't have a washing machine, or those basic things that we all just take for granted....

In addition to a lack of 'basics', the lives of families living on low incomes were made more complex by the limited housing options available to them. Several parents discussed the low quality of their housing. One parent explained:

Our house isn't very good. There's a leak and there's mould on the floor. The real estate aren't doing anything to fix it...The water is going out of the shower through the wall into the laundry and all the floor, you can see the mould on the floor.

Problems with poor housing quality were also linked to reports of inadequate and inefficient heating, which was mentioned by numerous parents. Limited finances meant that they were not able to improve the situation by purchasing a new heater or being able to pay for the electricity bills to keep their house warm. One mother commented,

It's very cold...They have heaters in every room, even the kitchen but they chew the power. Last year, I put [daughter]'s on overnight in winter. I used \$10 per per night over that.

Another mother explained that the only heating in her home was a wood heater which did not burn throughout the night. To keep the house warm she would set an alarm to wake her to put more wood into the heater, several times a night. As a result, she was not sleeping well, however, due to concerns about her children's asthma being made worse by a cold house, she felt this was her only option.

Underpinning economic difficulties, unemployment was a concern for some participants. One mother talked about the problems her partner was experiencing in looking for paid work. He had spent time in prison and did not have a drivers' license. This meant that he had been unsuccessful in securing employment, which added to the family's stress and economic disadvantage.

Another parent was highly distressed because of legal problems with a former partner. There were child custody issues and allegations of child abuse. Obtaining legal advice and support was limited by their low income which meant that they could only appoint a practitioner who would manage the matter through 'legal aid'. The parent was not satisfied with the service their solicitor was providing but could not afford to engage a different practitioner. This issue was ongoing and complex and was the source of significant distress for the parent, and the children.

These issues highlight some of the ways that financial disadvantage can compound and contribute to a suite of difficulties which can reduce quality of life and diminish the ability to engage with LiL in a consistent and positive way. Economic distress underpinned multiple social and personal barriers to engagement.

6.3.8. Social capital and complex lives

As discussed earlier, it was not uncommon for participants in the study to report that they had few friends or social contacts. One parent mentioned that attending LiL took courage, because of not knowing anyone,

A: Yeah, just getting that courage up to come walk in a room full of [strangers]...I suppose [I was] more uncomfortable when I first got there...I usually just sit in the corner and just keep to me-self...

For some parents, lack of social contact was the result of having a large family and being kept busy with the day-to-day household demands, which left little time for other activities. For others however, reduced social contact seemed to arise from a distrust of others, particularly those from outside the participant's immediate family. Service providers, including teachers, were sometimes perceived as potentially threatening. For some, this may have originated in negative experiences with 'the government' and government led organisations such as Child Safety Services. Some families observed during the study, did not seem have an easy relationship with people they saw as having social authority (such as teachers and medical professionals). These complex life experiences can make it difficult for families to develop strong trusting relationships that build social capital resources and confer benefits to both children and parents.

6.3.9. Cultural capital and complex lives

Whilst this study did not attempt to measure or quantify the cultural capital of participants, it was evident that many families possessed lower levels of socially dominant forms of cultural capitals, and that this presented barriers to their engagement with LiL. There was a relationship evident between families' complex lives, which were often characterised by enduring stress and day-to-day survival, and lower resources of socially preferred forms of cultural capital. As discussed in Chapter Three, the cultural capital that low income, socially isolated families tend to be highest in, is not always of the kind that are valued within educational settings. Bourdieu notes that cultural capital arises from individual's earliest

experiences and is built upon throughout the life course (Bourdieu, 1986). The proficiencies and attitudes of lower income families have often therefore, emerged through adversity and struggle. Some families in the study, particularly those identified as ‘less engaged’, had experienced negative contact with the criminal justice system, child safety and other government and non-government agencies. Such experiences, which can often be attributed to social exclusion and poverty, can reinforce a form of survival based cultural capital, which can include a distrust of institutions, including schools. Complex lives mean that it is particularly difficult for individuals to acquire the necessary cultural capital for middle class/socially dominant success. Families in the study whose life circumstances could be described as ‘less difficult’, tended to be those where one parent was engaged in full time or regular paid employment, parents had higher levels of educational attainment, the family owned at least one car, and they were living in secure housing. These families seemed to adjust more smoothly to the school setting and were familiar with the social rules and norms of the setting (field). Such families however, constituted only a small proportion of participants in this study. Moreover, the relationships that families formed with and through LiL were significantly influenced by specific aspects of LiL that acted to either facilitate or constrain engagement.

6.4. Theme Three: Features of Services

The ways that families engaged with LiL was influenced by how they saw the roles of LiL, and how LiL teachers and schools staff responded to the needs of families who used them. Families whose cultural capital was of less dominant forms, were more likely to be sensitive to specific supporting or discouraging aspects of LiL.

6.4.1. Vignette: Bethany

Bethany is Mum of three children. Chloe, 8, Ben 6, and Keely 2.

Bethany lives with her partner Adam, and Adams’ son from a previous relationship, Mathew (14) stays with them every second week. Adam works at a warehouse, and Bethany is a full time Mum. They have lived at River Downs for 9 years, and before that they were living in a nearby area, Merry Hills.

Bethany left school part way through Year 11 when she got a job at the local supermarket. Adam left school at the end of Grade Ten. He has had a few different

jobs and has been in his current work for about 18 months. Before this he was unemployed for 5 months. They struggle financially and this was difficult with a new baby, but they managed.

When their eldest child Chloe was small, they didn't go to any groups like LiL. Bethany is not sure what was available at the time. Adam thinks that his son Matthew went to a play group, but he can't remember if it was at the school or somewhere else. When Ben was little, Bethany heard about LiL through a friend and went along with her. She was very nervous about going along but it really helped that she already knew someone. The teacher was 'very friendly' and made a point to introduce her to other parents and carers. Bethany thinks it's great that the teacher and the other parents are so friendly and that LiL provides a lot of opportunities to feel more connected to other people:

...it's really welcoming. It's amazing for your children... We get so much social interaction through the school...

Bethany says that LiL is primarily child focused, however it is also a caring environment for parents,

...Well I feel that LiLs... I think they're more aimed at the kids... They are there [to] support the adults as well, I believe yeah...

Bethany says that LiL has really helped Ben transition into Kindergarten and school life:

... [Children should] be ready to be away from their parents, being a bit more independent [and] socially ready...

...Yeah, and [Ben] made lots of friends... I think that's helped [him] especially with pre-kinder.

Bethany particularly values the opportunities that LiL provides to go on excursions.

[We] go out on the trips and [the children] get so excited over the bus trip. And they just love it... they don't have a lot to do with kids their age, so when they can come to LiL and play with kids their age, it's awesome.

When asked what she would tell other parents of young children about LiL, Bethany said,

I'd tell them it's great, [child] absolutely loves coming, I love coming because it gets me talking with other adults and we just have absolute fun in that room, we can joke about anything... no one judges you, they're all really understanding, and it's just a great place to be.

Bethany has developed a good relationship with the teacher at LiL. When asked who she would talk to if she was worried about things with her children, she replied:

Probably school actually, like [teacher]'s great in playgroup, if I've got an issue with [child] I can talk to her about it...

Bethany attends LiL most weeks with Keely. She started taking Keely when she was about 10 months old. She didn't want to go before that because sometimes it can be a bit hectic at LiL with lots of active toddlers in a small classroom. She would sometimes take Keely to the baby group that runs at the local Community Centre, as the space was bigger, and the Centre was closer to home, which was easier to walk to when Adam had the car.

This vignette incorporates quotes from eight parent participants from both primary research sites.

6.4.2. Relationships

LiL provides rich opportunities at no cost, for parents and carers to develop a network of supportive relationships that can help ameliorate the impact of social and geographic isolation. Through supporting the establishment of social networks, LiL can play an important role in buffering families against the negative impact of stressful lives and isolation.

Most parents reported making new friendships at LiL that helped them to feel part of the community and provide supportive relationships. This was commented on by both families and LiL teachers. Whilst it was common for parents to report feeling very anxious about their early visits, along with a distrust of others, it was strongly evident that LiL created valued opportunities for parents to form social connections with other parents and teachers.

6.4.3. Relationships with teachers/service providers

Whilst many parents discussed feeling apprehensive during their early visits to LiL, they generally found LiL to be a friendly place where the teacher made them feel welcome and included. The importance of feeling welcome, particularly during early engagement with a service, was highlighted by one mother who discussed a visit to a new LiL group, after moving to a new (and more affluent suburb). Because she felt as though she did not fit in with the other parents and the teacher, she made the decision to drive across town to continue her children's LiL attendance at River Town. As recorded in my Fieldnotes:

I saw [parent] who has recently moved to a suburb across town. I asked her how things were going in the new house. She is happy with the house and had attended LiL at the local school once. She said that she had hated it and it was not a good experience for her. When I asked why, her first response was that the other parents there were "snobby" and that she didn't feel that she fitted in at all. The school is in a higher SES area and she felt that the people were very different to her. She said that no one spoke to her. Her [child] had not enjoyed the experience and "had a melt down". I asked about the LiL teacher. She commented that she was "nice but forgetful". Everyone in the room wears name tags and the teacher had said she would make one for her and the children, then went to do something else and forgot. Not wearing a name tag made her feel more conspicuous...She also mentioned that several weeks later the teacher called to let her know that the format would be different that week- she commented that the teacher didn't seem to realise she had not been there, or who she was. This made her feel unimportant. She commented she was very happy to be back at [previous school LiL] where she feels like she fits in, people are friendly, and the children are happy.

It was clear that when parents develop sound relationships with the service, they can be long lasting and provide important connection to the local community:

Q: What have your experiences been like with the school?

A: I've never had an issue; I love it. And it's so fun because some of the teachers recognise you from [previous years] as well, even teachers that aren't here anymore I bump into them in town and they're like hello how is (older daughter) and how is (older son).

It was evident that for such relationships to be successful, teachers need to work in partnership with families in a way that is free of judgemental attitudes and is culturally sensitive. Teachers with strong listening skills and an ability to help families feel safe and at ease (CCCH, 2010; Knaus et al., 2016). To support this, Tasmanian Department of Education employed teachers undergo 'Family Partnership Training' (Day et al., 2015). This training

seeks to support teachers' development of skills for working with families that are supportive and respectful.

When relationships between service providers and parents are not optimal, parents can feel uncomfortable, and the likelihood that they will seek support at services is reduced. For parents who are low in social support, this can be particularly isolating. When speaking about parenting concerns, the importance of feeling supported was highlighted by one mother:

Q: Is it something you talk to other people about? Have you talked to other mums?

A: I've got no one to talk to.

Q: You wouldn't talk to the other mums at school or your own Mum about that?

A: I'm not really close to anyone at school. I'll come and just drop [eldest child] off. If I see them, I'll say hello, and then I'm on my way again. I have a feeling that people don't like me, so I try to keep my distance. At the moment...the last few times I've been [at service], I've felt like [staff member] has something against me. Because... I don't know...Yeah, just the last few times I've seen her, she's barely acknowledged me. When I first used to come here, she used to [say] "Hi... how are you doing, come and give me a cuddle" or whatnot. Yeah, it just feels like that when I walk in now, she kind of looks at me and then keeps on talking. But it could be just me being silly. I don't know.

It was clear then, that many parents experienced their relationships with service providers very personally. This may be heightened by the power differences between teachers and parents. Parents who are experiencing isolation or other complexity may be particularly sensitive to the actions of teachers. When relationships were experienced as positive and warm, parents were more likely to return to LiL. If this warmth is not maintained, parents may feel this shift and interpret it as problematic. Central to the success of services in engaging families then, is relationships. The quality of caring and supportive relationships within and between parents and school staff, tended to shape parents ongoing use of LiL.

6.4.4. Preparation for Kindergarten

Parents valued LiL as a way to prepare children for their early years of formal schooling. As noted earlier, this is a key focus of LiL, and one that was important to parents. Many parents whose children had already commenced Kindergarten, felt that their experience at LiL had made them more comfortable in making the transition to school. Some parents had the

experience of being able to compare the differences between their older children who did not attend LiL, and their younger children who did. One mother described the differences in transitions to Kindergarten between children:

...[eldest child has] got big separation anxiety, so I would think that if he...had that little bit of help the year before, getting him prepared ...we probably wouldn't be having the issues now...it would have made [transition to Kindergarten] a bit easier... Getting to know what he has to do, and what's expected of him. Compared to my second child, he had nearly two years [of LiL]...there [are] no issues with him. He comes to school, he goes in, does what he has to do... where with my eldest, it's this continually repeating myself, and trying to reassure him that he's fine, even though he's in grade two.

Teachers strongly agreed with this perspective. As explained by a Kindergarten teacher:

...it makes a big difference with the children. You can tell who has been to pre-kinder and LiL. And who hasn't. They're just a lot more settled and they already know their way around the environment and they know where everything is and they know who you are. So their first day of school – they're used to coming and come in to say good-bye...But then you have some that haven't been involved at all and they're the ones that are upset on the first day and don't want Mum and Dad to go, and being dropped off with all these scary people that they've never seen before.

Despite wide agreement between teachers and parents that LiL helps children transition into schooling, there was sometimes a disparity between what parents and teachers understand as best for children's early learning and their preparation for school life. The LiL program and LiL teachers strongly encourage parents to participate in LiL activities closely with their children. Reflecting this, one teacher reported that parents and carers were given explicit instructions into the ways in which they were expected to interact with their children at LiL:

I said to them 'what you need to do when you come is -you need to come and sit at the job with your child, and you need to help your child do the job, and show your child how to share and how to do the job...'It's your job to be and do with your child. I'm just here to support you in that'.

Parents did not always use LiL in the ways that schools preferred and sometimes resisted the model of active parental engagement with their child. As highlighted, parents are encouraged to be active participants in activities with their child. Whilst this focus reflects the values and goals of the program, parents did not always share the same perspectives, and attended LiL with needs and values of their own. For example, several parents discussed

that they saw LiL as an important step in helping children to become more independent and comfortable with their peers:

... it's good because the children learn to deal with the separation time. If they were to go to pre-kinder and never been separated, well they're probably going to be a bit hussy fussy about it, and so would the parents.

Q: What [is] the purpose of Launching into Learning from your perspective?

A: Just getting him to interact with the other kids he doesn't know very well...Just go off and do his own thing, and just learning to listen to other grownups who he doesn't know as well, like teachers and stuff. That was the main big reason, and we went...[it's] just a good introduction to school.

In line with these perspectives, a few parents expressed an awareness that they were not compliant with the expectation to be actively engaging with their children at LiL. One parent explained that this had created tension between her and the LiL teacher:

[Teacher] didn't sort of like how my sort of taking a step back sort of from [my child] but...I needed to get [child] ready for school...I'm their parent sort of I know what they need a bit more...I'm the one who spends all the time with them...I knew what [child] needed... and I participate with my children sort of, but I do a lot of that sort of stuff at home... there are a few other parents who were the same last year...because when they go in to kinder, we can't be there and if they're used to sort of just relying on us, then it can be very hard for them...

Q: So...really encouraging the parent to participate...with the child was not a comfortable thing for you?

A: No... [It wasn't].

Regardless, such parents made active decisions to approach LiL in a way that they preferred and that they felt was most appropriate for their children. A further way that parents engaged with LiL was as a place for themselves to take some much-needed respite or 'time out'.

6.4.5. A place for parents

Highlighting the ways that LiL functioned as a place for parents to build positive social relationships, receive support and refuge from daily pressures, several parents commented that LiL was a 'safe' place where they felt free of judgement,

...it's a safe place to be, because you know that [the teacher] won't judge, and if you need help she'll put her hand up and help you straight away where she can...the first time [my child] had a meltdown in LiL I felt so embarrassed...but [teacher] was just like, "It's okay".

The importance of families' first visits to LiL, and the experience of LiL being a place that is safe from judgment, is central. When parents felt comfortable that they (or their children) would not be judged meant they were more comfortable at LiL. This had the effect of supporting their attendance and helped to reduce social isolation. Conversely, when parents did feel that teachers were judging them or their parenting, they were more likely to disengage.

A LiL teacher commented that the sessions sometimes offer relaxation and opportunities for creativity for parents,

Sometimes we can start off our session at the table making a craft activity, which I found that some of the parents have really enjoyed too, just sitting there and colouring in...they find some of those activities really relaxing...

Some teachers put considerable effort into fostering supportive relationships with parents and did so in ways that they knew were accessible and familiar to parents. It was evident that this took considerable time and emotional labour. An example of this was recorded in my fieldnotes:

As [teacher] was walking me to the front office to say goodbye, she was telling me about how well her use of Facebook has worked in engaging LiL parents in activities and the group. She shares photos from activities and uses Facebook to remind parents about upcoming events such as excursions, swimming etc. She said that sometimes parents use the private messaging function to let her know if they are not able to attend LiL; this is something she has been encouraging. She also sometimes gets messages from parents who have issues with others in the group, which she also encourages, as she wants to be informed about any tensions, saying that if she knows about problems [between parents or staff] she can help to resolve them, rather than have parents stop coming to LiL, and therefore having their children miss out on the benefits.

Offering this degree of very personalised support to families took significant emotional labour and at times, raised some ethical challenges, sometimes blurring distinctions between her work and personal time:

A drawback has been that sometimes parents message her well outside work hours (e.g. late evenings and weekends) and sometime expect to engage with her in conversation at these times. Additionally, parents have sent her “friend” requests, which she has previously accepted, but no longer feels comfortable doing. She now feels faced with a problem of wanting to be seen to be fair and relating to all families equally, whilst having “added” some on Facebook, and not others... teachers at this school often need to relate to families in a deep way to get them engaged and keep them engaged.

Using Facebook to communicate and develop relationships between teachers and families utilised a popular, familiar, and informal medium to engage with parents, or “meeting people where they consume media” (Gustafson, 2018: 29) helped parents to feel connected, listened to and valued. Whilst she may not have conceived of it as such, leveraging parents’ social media skills was a way for this teacher to connect with parents’ existing (‘low brow’ forms of) cultural capital. Whilst this was sometimes quite time consuming, and somewhat intrusive, it was effective and meaningful to parents.

LiL provided valued connections and referrals to some specialist services for parents and children. Speech therapy, and the Early Childhood Intervention Service (ECIS) and mental health supports were used and valued by several participants. These referrals helped to prepare children and their families for their formal schooling and were able to respond to a range of challenges faced by families. These services were valued, but often difficult to access due to long wait times.

The middle-class settings of schools meant that they were places that shone a spotlight on the differences in families’ levels of capitals. Schools, like most early childhood services, are sites where the possession of socially dominant forms of capital operate to ease transition into services, meaning that parents and children who are higher in dominant capitals are more likely to ‘blend in’. Those families whose capitals are not be of the dominant forms, may be more likely to be seen as disruptive or problematic, as they may not adapt to the rules and expectations of the site as readily or naturally.

6.4.6. Economic capital

Whilst LiL did not connect to economic capital in a direct or explicit way, it was evident that it can help to ameliorate some of the effects of low economic capital by making early

childhood education accessible to low income families. For example, some families saw LiL as an alternative to services they could not afford to use, such as day care programs. LiL provided families with opportunities to participate in activities that would otherwise be unattainable to them. An example was recorded in my Fieldnotes:

... there was a theatrical performance on today. It was only a small group of parents and children attending. Some of the children seemed a little overwhelmed, whilst other really enjoyed the experience. The performer did a lot of audience participation involving parents. It was good to see [parent] enjoying [their] part in the performance- [teacher] has told me previously that when [they] first come to LiL [they] were very shy and hesitant to get involved. The group seems like a safe place for [parent] where [they] feel comfortable.

Parents particularly valued excursions that were offered by LiL, including swimming, farm visits, music lessons, library activities.

[Children] get more opportunities to do things like with the swimming. I wouldn't be able to do that before because I don't have a licence, so I wouldn't be able to do that.

... he likes coming there. Spending time getting the things that we don't have at home. Things that are different. Different toys to play with...

Building on parenting skills and families' resources, parents also valued the opportunities to learn new ideas for different activities they could do at home with their children:

...I come here and I look at what they're doing here and there's so much creativity here and new ideas and things I wouldn't've thought about...whether it's getting a bag of rice in a container and letting them go for it or you know what I mean? There are just so many things that you wouldn't normally, or I wouldn't naturally think of to do with him.

LiL was also seen as a place where children could play with a range of educational toys and gain social experiences that were otherwise not available to them.

The Launching into Learning program is amazing. Like there's more than one day [that you can attend], there's different things you can do...It's amazing for your children...I had no desire to put [daughter] in childcare. We get so much social interaction through the school that she just doesn't need it.

These activities are often those that middle-income families participate in regularly, with children receiving a range of benefits that connect to social and cultural capital, further advantaging them in the school setting. In this regard, LiL helps to 'fill the gap' for lower income families (not to the same extent, as excursions are not weekly or long term).

6.4.7. Social capital

An important aspect of the LiL experience for parents was the way that attending LiL supported their development of new friendships and social connections which helped to ameliorate the effects of isolation:

I didn't mix with anyone socially before the children started school here, but I've actually, you know, built some really nice relationships with other Mums...So yeah, and everyone just is quite friendly. A lot friendlier than I thought...

...sometimes you just get too much in your head... you're just at home, you're just into yourself because there's nothing else really to do. But sort of when there's a LiL, then you can sort of go out and you can take a moment, and you love your kids, but when you're at home, they're just Mum, Mum, Mum, Mum...But I've made some friends during going to Launching in to Learning, just from being able to sit there and have a talk with them.

It gets me out of the house around other adults, because otherwise I'd just be sitting at home and just me and [daughter].

Reflecting this for many parents, attending LiL assisted them in enriching their resources of social capital. They frequently reported having made new friendships and social connections within their local community. This had the effect of reducing social isolation. Reflecting Bourdieu's social capital, these connections have the potential to be utilised to confer a range of social benefits to families that can help ameliorate some effects of economic disadvantage. Stronger social and community networks mean that families can better share resources such as transport, knowledge about services, parenting skills and support.

...it's nice to be able to get out and sit with some other Mums and talk to them and if you've got issues with different things, you can talk to them and they can say, well, this is what I've done sort of vice versa...

...we'll say good morning, we'll have a little bit of a chat ...So, [LiL's] been really good, I've got more friends now... because before I didn't really - I had one friend, but she wasn't, the friendship stopped, so, it was just me by myself. So, once I started coming, I made more friends, which was really nice.

Whilst they used different language to describe it, parents generally saw the development of social capital as an important part of LiL. One mother talked about leaving a LiL program at another school due to reduced opportunity to develop new social relationships:

It was a two-hour session on a Friday. And there were lots and lots of people there, so the children didn't really build any relationships, and also as a parent you didn't [build relationships], because it was so busy.

Developing relationships with and between parents, and subsequently growing their social capital, was identified by a LiL teacher as an important and deliberate aspect of her work.

...I've really pushed and found... that lots of the families are encouraging each other and they're starting to communicate more. So, we're starting to slowly build up like a little bit of a community.

For some other families, it is being that person to listen...Because depending on their background, where they've come from, some don't actually have support around them. So, it's being that person that they can come to and they can offload. Have that private, confidential conversation with them, which isn't going to go any further than that conversation that they may have with you. But there can be lots of difficulties that they're experiencing. Sometimes you might need to refer them on to other services as well.

The support families receive at LiL often extends beyond that immediately related to children. As noted above, teachers often supported families with referrals to a range of services and resources. The accumulation of social capital was supported at LiL through encouragement and good rapport. Parents valued this highly. This was illustrated by one mothers' description of contacting a LiL teacher to share the news that she had passed her driver's licence test:

The day I got [my driver's licence] ...I messaged [teacher] and I told her that I'd passed, and she was so excited. I felt like I needed to tell her, because she knew that I was trying to get [my licence], so when I did I thought I've got to let her know...When I didn't pass my first test I was a bit upset, and I had a talk about it, and she said, "You'll get it next time"...

This highlights how LiL can operate to support the enrichment of families' social capital, not only by facilitating parent-to-parent networks, but also through creating meaningful connections between parents and teachers. This represents what Bourdieu (1986: 248) referred to as "institutionalised relationships" which can be leveraged for gain. As observed by Lareau (Lareau, 2011; Lareau et al., 2016), when parents have positive relationships with teachers and schools, they are better positioned to engage with them in ways that maximise opportunities for their children. This is evident in this study where many (but not all) parents report that they are comfortable approaching their children's teachers with any concerns they have regarding their development or progress at school.

6.4.8. Cultural capital

LiL supports families in building the types of cultural capital that are dominant in the education system. In developing broader cultural capital resources at LiL, parents and children are better positioned to transition into the school system and respond in ways that are understood as ‘appropriate’ to the demands it places on them. This is evident in (sometimes explicit) teaching and modelling of cultural norms and behaviors that proliferate the school environment. This was described by LiL teachers:

...[LiL is] really good for the parents as well... it's being able to guide and assist the families. Not actually tell them, "This is what you should be doing."...just to support and guide them along the way and actually help them. Because some of them are not confident themselves in being able to do things...

I read them a book, so it's modelling...how we read a book, asking questions, what we can sort of do... each week I have a nursery rhyme that I hand out to the families, so they can take that home...

...another thing I've really pushed for LiL, is... for parents to...sit alongside and actually work with their children. So showing them how to use their pair of scissors... Families will say to me, "They're not allowed to do that at home" and so I've said, "That's okay, because that's why you come to LiL..."

Most parents seemed to value this, and they reported that their children were able to transition into Kindergarten more readily, and then full-time schooling. As commented by one parent, “LiL is such a great segue or pathway to Kindergarten...”. This was particularly noted by parents who had not attended LiL with their first children but did attend later with their second or third child. Parents widely reported that their children who had participated in the LiL programs, had a better understanding of the school environment, school routines and the expected behaviors in relation to teachers and other children.

...if I stick to LiL, when he starts to go to school it's going to be easier on him because he's sort of seen the teachers around the yard, he's been around the school, he's been in the Kinder yard. So, I like to make it easy on him.

Yeah, it means it's going to make it much easier when, so the first day of kinder, I'm not going to be stressing and she's not going to be stressing, and she'll think, we've sort of already done this.

6.5. Chapter conclusion

This chapter has presented the overarching findings of the ethnographic arm of this study. Parents understood that their children received numerous benefits from LiL attendance and

had a strong focus on wanting to help ease children's transitions into Kindergarten and later 'full time' schooling. It was evident throughout that many of the parents who took part on this research were living with a suite of difficulties that were often complex and overlapping. These challenges presented barriers for engagement with LiL.

Feeling that LiL was 'safe' and a place of non-judgment helped build trust. Supportive relationships formed between parents and teachers at LiL, scaffolded ongoing engagement and helped parents overcome aspects of isolation, building families' stocks of social capital.

Economic, cultural and social capitals were all pertinent concepts in this analysis. Families' generally low levels of economic capital permeated their lives and experiences, underpinning social isolation, lived experiences of stress and complexity. Having a low income meant that most participants were living in relatively isolated communities, with limited access to services, resources and opportunities for social connection. This meant that they often had restricted opportunities to grow and leverage social capital, further constraining their lives. Parents' restricted abilities to acquire economic and social capitals also connected to cultural capital. These findings connect to class and the unequal ways in which capital is distributed. Accordingly, whilst they used different terminology, teachers frequently referred to the need for children and families to acquire greater resources of the sorts of cultural capitals that are expected at school. When relationships between parents and teachers were sound, and families felt at ease and connected to LiL, children (and parents) were well placed for broadening their cultural capitals.

LiL conferred numerous opportunities for families, but interventions can be accompanied by unintended consequences. Education systems risk enacting symbolic violence against parents and children when the cultural arbitrary is imposed on families. Families may experience the explicit, taken-for-granted teaching of dominant forms of cultural capital as stigmatising or as delegitimation of their own skills, beliefs, and experiences (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977). In this light, non-engagement can be interpreted as a form of resistance to this experience.

In Chapter Seven: Discussion, the findings of this research are synthesised to create an integrated perspective of the results of this study.

Chapter 7: Discussion

What the social world has made, the social world, armed with this knowledge...can undo... policy deliberations that do not draw out fully the range of possibilities which are available for action and which science can aid in revealing, can be considered as guilty of non-assistance to oppressed people.

Pierre Bourdieu (1993a: 145)

This chapter brings together all the different aspects of the thesis. The first part of the chapter is structured according to the research questions that guided the investigation. The findings related to each question are discussed, and further contextualised. This is followed by a discussion of how Bourdieu's cultural and social capitals, along with symbolic violence were particularly salient in the findings of this study. The findings are then addressed in relation to disciplines such as neuroscience, that underscore a growing focus on early childhood education programs. The strengths and limitations of the investigation are detailed, and areas for future research connected to the findings of this study are addressed.

The findings of this study tell a story that is complex, and in places contradictory. Responding to interdisciplinary evidence that stresses the centrality of the early years for future development and wellbeing, LiL is designed to support young children and their families through early learning and transition into schooling. There is a particular focus on families living in low SES communities. While it was not made explicit in documents, or by school staff, the thread that runs throughout the findings of this study is class. As discussed in Chapter Three, Bourdieu's approach to class considers occupational divisions and the related unequal distribution of the forms of legitimised capital. This unequal distribution of valued capitals shapes social locations and affinity with particular social settings (such as schools). Schools both demand and reproduce their own socially privileged capitals. Consequently, when families living in communities that are characterised by low SES enter schools, they move into social settings where there are often stark differences between their own capitals, and those which guide education policy, pedagogy, teachers, and other school staff. This will now be discussed in relation to each of the questions that guided this study.

7.1. Question One: How does the Tasmanian Government describe and position LiL and Kindergarten? What are the problems that these services seek to address?

The analysis of Belonging, Being and Becoming: *The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia* (EYLF)(DET, 2009), and the *Guide to Reading and Using Tasmania's Strategy for Children Pregnancy - to Eight years 2018-2021* (the Strategy) (DoE, 2017c), along with the analysis of seven DoE brochures designed for parents of children who are of Kindergarten age or younger, highlighted several key problem representations and messages regarding Tasmanian Government universal early childhood education services. This, in combination with formal and informal interview data from school senior staff and early years teachers, and teacher aides, provided insight into the ways that the Government describes and positions LiL and Kindergarten, and the 'problems' they seek to address.

Most prominently, LiL and Kinder were described and positioned by the Tasmanian Government as services that are about creating school readiness, and transitioning children from the home environment, into that of the school. The broad purpose of this, is to address the expressed problem of sub-optimal early childhood development, and to improve low educational achievement amongst Tasmanian children and adults. This goal reflects interdisciplinary research evidence that early learning programs are positively associated with improved learning outcomes and school readiness (Petitclerc et al., 2017; Speight et al., 2010). Whilst the term 'school readiness' was not explicitly used in the analysed documents, it was evident throughout this study that ideas related to school readiness formed an important focus for the state and federal governments, and school staff. One way that this was expressed in the examined policy documents, was a focus on improving children's educational and social development in the birth to five years age group. As noted in the EYLF, a Federal Government policy that informs the Tasmanian approach to early childhood education, "The aim of this document is to extend and enrich children's learning from birth to five years and through transition to school" (5). Further, the application of the WPR approach (Bacchi, 2009) to the Federal and Tasmanian policy documents, revealed concerns with children presenting to Kindergarten ill-prepared for schooling, and not ready to transition from home. The long-term implications of this were problematised as children lacking confidence and creativity, and a range of concerns regarding their future wellbeing and productivity as citizens. LiL and Kindergarten then, are

broadly positioned as means to improve the school readiness of children and their families. This view was supported by teachers and other school personnel who were participants in this study, with the exception of one senior school staff member and early years teacher. This teacher acknowledged that children and their families arrive at school with differing levels of readiness, however she argued that schools ought to be ready to respond to and accommodate these differences, rather than expecting children and families to carry the core responsibility of readiness, change, and adaptation.

There were many areas of similarity between parents and teachers in terms of what they believed makes a 'school ready' child. As identified through the ethnographic investigation, parents and teachers alike saw independence as a key aspect of school readiness. This perspective was also supported in DoE parent brochures that noted children learn 'independence, confidence and skills' through active use of Kindergarten. The development of independence was seen as being stimulated in children through the use of multiple explicit and implicit strategies that seek to teach and model the ways of being, thinking and behaving that are considered as prerequisites for educational success.

Although there is ample, contemporary evidence that parent and child based factors form only one aspect of school readiness (for example see Bingham and Whitebread (2012), Kokkalia et al. (2019)), community school readiness, and schools' readiness for children were not emphasised in the examined documents, or teacher interview responses. This reflects a common neoliberal tendency to focus on individual level factors, rather than structural factors that might impact individuals. This focus was evident not only in the examined policy documents and parent information brochures, but also in the ways that teachers engaged with parents through 'modelling' and direct instruction about the expectations of children and parents at school. This was further reflected in formal and informal interviews with teachers who indicated the need to prepare parents for school, but did not explicitly discuss community school readiness, or schools' readiness for children.

Individual level factors are undeniably part of school readiness. However, they form one part of a bigger picture. Embracing a social pedagogy (Bingham and Whitebread, 2012), one teacher was an exception to this. They actively resisted the parent/child focus of school readiness, arguing that primary responsibility for school readiness rested with schools' readiness for children and their ability to responsively meet the needs of every child and

family. That only one teacher expressed this view, suggests there is work to be done in broadening schools and governments views of school readiness. A more meaningful strategy to support families should take a holistic view that de-centralises individual factors and seeks to create a supportive and responsive environment. One way of doing this is to adopt a broader definition of school readiness, such as the four-part equation of Kagan and Rigby (2003): Ready families + Ready early childhood services + Ready communities + Ready schools = Ready children (see also Christensen et al., 2020).

Such an approach would constitute as Bourdieu (1993: 145) argues, an undoing of “what the social world has made” to set up an environment that moves away from creating change in families by means of symbolic violence and imposition of the cultural arbitrary. This is not a radical idea. Multi-part approaches are well established in Finland, Norway and Sweden (Bingham and Whitebread, 2012). While it could be argued that LiL itself constitutes a community-based support for school readiness, the discourse of responsibility for the preparation of children for schooling was strongly directed towards parents. There was little evidence of an inward-looking approach to change. A genuine community-based view would redistribute some of these responsibilities so that communities (including schools) begin to take on a role in supporting school readiness, and that this role is recognised and considered important.

Further focussing on family responsibility, parents are positioned within the examined documents and LiL practices as children’s ‘first teachers’ who are primarily responsible for children’s early learning. On one hand, it could be argued that this perspective acknowledges and respects parents’ importance and understanding of their children. However, an interesting aspect of this terminology is that ‘teachers’ are generally understood to be experts in pedagogy, who have undergone specific training. Given the context in which it is used, this terminology also conveys the government’s expectations that parents are to engage with children and schools in particular ways, and with an implicit focus on the creation of school readiness. While parents are ‘experts’ insofar as knowing their children, there appears to be an expectation then, that parents utilise LiL to develop a corresponding form of pedagogical expertise. This is congruent with the work of others (see for example Evans and Davies (2010); Vincent and Ball (2007)) who note that the early years are becoming increasingly scholarised, with the family home becoming “a site of pedagogy”

(Stirrup et al., 2015: 92). Whilst this makes sense from a developmental perspective (ie. understanding of the developmental importance of the early years), there is a real risk of problematising families who are not able to enact this approach as a result of multiple structural and personal factors. These challenges remain largely unaddressed.

Supporting this, regular and sustained engagement with both Kindergarten and LiL was broadly viewed by teachers as evidence of responsible parenting, and conversely, parents who did not use LiL, or used it only sporadically, were often perceived as problematic. Parents are repeatedly implored to 'get involved' with their children's education, and this involvement is emphasised from the outset of families' first contact with schools at LiL. Being involved is constructed as regular engagement with LiL. This 'learning together' is understood as a technique which will provide children with the optimal conditions for learning, and there is sound evidence to support this argument. There is however, the implication that parents who do not participate in programs in specific, sanctioned ways are not engaged or interested in their children's development. This ignores that parents might be supporting their children's learning in diverse ways and may serve to delegitimise 'unsanctioned' learning activities that take place in other settings.

It was evident throughout this study that there is a need to better respond to the social and structural conditions that constrain families' abilities to utilise services such as LiL (Cohen-Vogel et al., 2010). Although school staff were very aware of the existence of social and structural barriers to service use, non-engagement was often seen as part of a cultural (class based) problem that was embedded in parents and communities. While the EYLF encourages teachers to consider the sociocultural contexts in which children live, these contexts are often implied to be problematic and deficient. Moreover, there was no explicit scope for meaningfully accommodating differing cultural capitals. The skills, resourcefulness, adaptability, and resilience of families living in low SES communities did not appear to be recognised, let alone valued. Rather, throughout the document analysis and ethnographic investigation, there is evidence of a consistent focus on the need for families to change (or to learn socially preferred ways of being) so that they are more compatible with schools. This represents the enactment of symbolic violence, whereby the perspectives and values of socially dominant, middle and ruling class institutions are understood as legitimate, whilst those of the working class are delegitimised and problematised.

LiL is also positioned as a support for families, and as a place where parents can connect with teachers and a range of early childhood development resources and specialists. The analysis of DoE parent brochures highlighted the way that parents were encouraged to view LiL as an avenue for accessing a range of helpful resources for their children. Teachers echoed this aspect of LiL (and Kindergarten), and parents generally valued the support that they received at schools and LiL. This was especially evident in cases where LiL attendance had resulted in children receiving speech therapy, and other specialist services. Numerous participants reported having engaged with these services, and that this contact had been facilitated by LiL teachers. In addition, numerous parents engaged with teachers to receive informal, conversational advice about their children's learning and development which was highly valued by parents.

In summary, LiL and Kindergarten are described and positioned by the Tasmanian Government as services which help foster the development of child and family-based school readiness. LiL is understood as a means by which transition to schooling (and Kindergarten) is eased for both families and children. This is achieved through the promotion of independence, confidence, and a range of social, academic, emotional and physical skills. LiL is further viewed as a way to promote the skills of parents and carers, who are positioned as children's 'first teachers' who subsequently require special training. This approach seeks to address the expressed problems of low social and educational achievement among the birth-five cohort, and a lack of readiness for school.

7.2. Question Two: How are families using LiL?

This question addresses the broad topics of where, how, and why participants were using LiL. As detailed in previous chapters, families used and engaged with LiL in various ways that were significantly influenced by access or lack of access, as a result of social and/or geographic isolation, families lives and complexity, as well as factors that are based in services themselves. This is relevant to the way that Bourdieu frames social class. For Bourdieu, social class is significantly connected to patterns of consumption, which are in turn linked to the distribution of capitals (Bourdieu, 1987; Nash, 2006). As a result, how families used (consumed) LiL were strongly related to class.

7.2.1. Where, how, and why?

Most families who participated in the study who were using LiL, did so in their local community, or at a location as close to their community as possible. For some families, particularly those living in the more disparately populated Distant Hills area, LiL services were not necessarily close to home, but families generally attended those services that were the shortest distance. For some, this was made difficult by the lack of private transport. This finding is congruent with existing Australian research (for example Carbone et al. (2004); Cortis et al. (2009); Currie et al. (2007)) that describes how lack of transport contributes to social exclusion and disadvantage. Most participants in this study were female. This is congruent with the ECEC sector more broadly and reflects long standing cultural norms regarding parenting. Whilst the role of men in raising children has become increasingly valued over recent decades, change in the ECEC sector is slow (Peeters et al. 2015; Rohrmann, 2019).

Transport disadvantage presented a significant barrier to service and social engagement for many families in this study. There were exceptions however, with some families opting to utilise sites that were not their 'local' LiL. There were several reasons for this. For some families, visiting sites located further from home fitted in with other planned activities. One family for example, needed to travel on a regular basis to the nearest city from Distant Hills to access medical services for their child. Utilising a LiL /CFC located closer to the city was therefore more convenient. A River Town parent who used an out-of-area service decided to do so after moving to a new house. The new family home was located on the other (more affluent) side of town. When she attended her new 'local' LiL, she felt uncomfortable and unwelcome. Subsequently, she made the decision to travel approximately 25 minutes to access LiL in her previous community (passing numerous other LiL sites on the way).

However, in the main, and consistent with existing Australian research about early childhood education (see Cloney et al. (2016)), families attended LiL at their local school. This was informed not only by convenience, economic, and access considerations, but also parents overarching goals and reasons for attending LiL. For example, parents wanted their children to form friendships with the other children with whom they would attend Kindergarten. Connected to their perspectives of school readiness, parents also felt it was important for their children to get to know their future teachers, routines, and school

environment. Local LiL attendance also corresponds with aims of the DoE who have been increasingly moving towards place based programs that enable better access to services for families. This is reflected in the provision of LiL at all DoE primary schools, a small number of CFCs, and forms part of the broader DoE policy of place-based service delivery. Based on the CFC model, the Tasmanian DoE is currently in the process of developing additional community-based Child and Family Learning Centres, with the goal of increasing access and participation in ECEC (DoE, 2020). This reflects a significant body of research that demonstrates success in easing families' access to services through the provision of place-based service delivery (see for examples Diamond-Berry & Ezech, 2020; Taylor et al. 2017).

Most participant families who were using LiL did so on a regular basis, usually attending available sessions weekly. These families tended to form core groups at sites, and I became very familiar with parents and children and staff at the River Town site where my fieldwork was based. Most of these parents were well integrated into LiL and had well developed relationships with teachers, and other parents. Children had formed friendships and enjoyed seeing each other from week-to-week. In addition, there was a smaller number of families who were highly engaged, attending more than one LiL session each week. These families attended for example a 'Playgroup' session, a 'Gross Motor Skills' group, and 'Out and About' sessions when they were offered, thus sometimes attending three LiL sessions per school week. In contrast however, teachers also described families who were "on the books" but who had not engaged with LiL more than once or twice in many months. Isolation and complex family lives often presented barriers to engagement for families. A small number of these parents also expressed resistance to services, distrust of service providers, or had experienced interpersonal difficulties with other parents or staff at LiL. An additional way that some families connected with LiL was through home visits from LiL and Kindergarten teachers. Families who received home visits were often experiencing specific barriers to LiL engagement (such as illness or anxiety about attending), and in common with other studies (for example, White et al. (2020)), teachers tended to view home visits as a short-term strategy to help ease families into on-site LiL or Kindergarten activities. Home visits were valued by teachers as a way to support and engage parents, however time constraints frequently limited their capacity to do so.

Overall, differing patterns of how families engaged with LiL reflected broad and dynamic differences in families' lives. School teachers and teacher aides often reported that less engaged families were those who were in crisis, living with complex domestic, family, or social circumstances. This reflects the idea sometimes heard in schools, that families most 'in need' of services, are those least likely to be engaged with them. The lack of connection with some families was seen more as a family-based issue, than a service-based weakness. Whilst not malicious, this idea connects again, to Bourdieu's perspectives regarding the ways that social institutions problematise the working class/non dominant through symbolic violence and delegitimation.

What is clear is that when families regularly accessed LiL on a local, close-to-home basis, they were better able to connect with each other, and their school. These families were undeniably more effectively prepared for transition into school life and reported doing so with greater ease and comfort. This access and participation can therefore be seen to foster the diversification of families' social and cultural capitals, and there were numerous examples throughout the study of this conferring benefits to parents and children.

Families attended LiL for several key reasons. Almost universally, parents expressed an understanding of the importance of providing their children with diverse opportunities to play and socialise with other children and adults. Some participants saw LiL as a free alternative to day care. These parents recognised that children receive social and educational benefits from attending day care and wanted their children to be exposed to these same opportunities. They were however, constrained in doing so, often due to economic concerns. Some parents spoke about LiL offering benefits to children that they would otherwise receive in day care facilities. Parents also reported that LiL afforded opportunities to engage in play activities that were different from home. Teachers noted too that parents were sometimes hesitant about 'messy play' with paint, water, 'slime' or felt tip pens at home, and that LiL was an ideal setting for children to participate in such activities.

Whilst they did not use the term, parents who used LiL were mindful of multiple aspects of school readiness. LiL was consistently understood as an important way to support children's transition from home into formal education. For many parents this awareness was a precursor to LiL attendance and was a central reason for enrolment in the program. LiL

attendance could also be seen as a way to train parents into a particular view of school readiness that may impose symbolic violence through the process of misrecognition.

While not the explicit focus of LiL, parents also described receiving benefits from attending LiL sessions. For example, it was common to hear parents in the study report that their attendance at LiL had helped them to 'get out of the house' and socialise with other parents. This aspect of LiL was important to parents, and it was evident that LiL attendance helped them to overcome some aspects of social, and geographic isolation. Most parents reported at a minimum, that they enjoyed the opportunity to talk with other adults. Some parents remarked that new friendships they had formed at LiL had extended to outside of the LiL classroom, and that they were experiencing advantages through having a larger circle of friends and peers. These benefits included information sharing, feeling less isolated, having someone to talk to about their parenting experiences, and being better connected with the local community.

From a Bourdieusian perspective, this finding reflects a growth in the cultural and social capital of families. Social capital was also expanded through the development of trusting relationships with service providers, who not only had professional skills and knowledge to offer families, but also the capacity to link parents with other parents, and services. Through the formation of trusting relationships between schools and parents, parents become connected to a powerful social institution, and were better able to access and secure a range of advantages for their children. Lareau (1989, 2011) discusses this and like Bourdieu, observes that middle class families often have a more natural affinity with educational institutions which enables them to advocate for their children and secure a range of associated benefits. One of the ways middle class parents achieve this is through the development of close relationships with schools and teachers. Families from the dominant classes tend to utilise early childhood education activities as part of a reproduction strategy (Bourdieu, 1977) to secure their children's place in the middle or elite classes. Increasingly, this begins in the earliest years of life, as the interdisciplinary evidence continues to highlight the importance of the early years in children's futures, and parents are encouraged to respond accordingly. In this light, LiL can be understood as an endeavour (by government, schools, teachers, and parents) to "make up a middle-class child" (Vincent and Ball, 2007: 1067), by introducing them into middle class settings at the earliest opportunity. As argued

by Lareau (2002), and Vincent and Ball (2007), working class parents tend to possess different class related “cultural logics of childrearing” (Lareau, 2002: 772) than those of the dominant classes. As a result, lower status (or lower class) families are less likely to engage in these activities of cultural reproduction. It was evident in this study however, that LiL provides opportunities for working class families to be exposed to and become familiar with the habituses, capitals and practices of schools. This exposure appeared to facilitate the expansion of parents and children’s own habituses and capitals, supporting them in a more comfortable negotiation of schools. As a result, parents may be more comfortable to engage with teachers and school staff to advocate for their children, and secure potential benefits for them.

Habitus is durable, but as noted by Hoy (2005: 106) “has a certain plasticity” and can adapt or be built upon. From a social justice perspective, this is important. Habitus, social and cultural capitals can be diversified and built upon, without an agenda that implicitly infers that families are deficient, or that the habitus and capitals of their family background ought to be abandoned. It is my argument that this diversification perspective acknowledges that families already possess a suite of capitals and habituses that have developed in response to their own life experiences and backgrounds. Whilst these may not always reflect the same habitus and capitals that are most valued in dominant institutions and settings, they are not inherently less valuable, or deviant. Deviance is constructed in the eyes of the constructor. This perspective understands then, the arbitrariness of legitimisation and delegitimisation, and invites a reflexive approach to deconstructing structures which continue to perpetuate (or at least reinforce) disadvantage. Indeed, teachers and school personnel too, may expand their own habituses and capitals through close engagement with families. Lower SES families however are likely to receive a greater social benefit, as teachers are already in positions of power and are ‘playing’ on their own social field. In diversifying families’ habitus, social and cultural capitals, small steps towards levelling the field may be made.

7.3. Question Three: What are the key factors that shape families’ use of, and engagement with LiL?

As outlined in Chapter Six, there were numerous overlapping and complex factors that shaped the ways that families engaged with LiL. Through the process of thematic analysis of the ethnographic data however, these were reduced to three overarching (and overlapping)

themes; social and geographic isolation, complex lives, and service-based factors. Whilst there was individual variation in how these factors operated to facilitate or constrain service engagement, there was considerable congruence overall.

7.4. Isolation

A significant proportion of parents in this study were affected by social and geographic isolation. Isolation was often the result of low income which meant that families were living in geographically isolated communities. Further, a range of social factors added to parents' experiences of isolation. These are discussed below.

7.4.1. Transport disadvantage

Lack of reliable, private transport was a barrier to social inclusion and engagement with LiL and other services for many families in this study. Several participants reported that they had restricted opportunities to attain a driver's license. Another issue for many families was the costs associated with owning and maintaining a motor vehicle. As a result, participants often reported that they did not drive, or own a vehicle. Additionally, participants described walking long distances, using taxi services, and relying on family or friends to drive them to services and appointments. Others reported using bus services, which were also associated with difficulties. For example, one mother explained that not all buses are 'pram friendly'. Others noted that buses did not always run at times that aligned with parent's transport needs. Moreover, bus stops were not always located in close proximity to families' homes.

In the cold Tasmanian winter, parents often needed to decide whether to go out and have their children get wet and cold, or miss appointments, or social engagements. These are not the sorts of problems that wealthier parents typically need to consider, and it is evident that schooling is structured to reflect the more affluent lifestyles and practices of the architects of education systems- the middle-class. Transport disadvantage is a significant barrier to social inclusion, physical and mental health, and engagement in a range of social, civic, and educational endeavors. Transport disadvantage is a social justice issue as well as an obstacle to consistent engagement in early childhood services and education such as LiL (Cortis et al., 2009, Ma et al., 2018). Families who are affected by transport disadvantage are likely to find it more difficult to avoid being labeled as 'unengaged' in their children's early learning. To respond positively to DoE messaging to 'get involved' for example, a greater investment in

time, resources and energy is often required for lower SES parents than higher SES families. This is not widely acknowledged in schools or the literature.

7.4.2. Geographic isolation

National and internationally, low income neighborhoods experience socio-spatial separation from higher income communities and services (Warr et al., 2017). This separation presents a social and logistical barrier to families' participation in a range of social activities, further entrenching isolation and disadvantage. Reflecting this, geographic isolation often made engagement with LiL difficult for parents. Participants' homes were usually located in outer suburbs, rural or semi-rural areas. For some in the Distant Hills community, this was a choice made by parents that connected to farming or other employment considerations. However, for many (particularly those in the River Town site) the decision to live in outlying communities was dictated by economic concerns and the availability of lower cost housing. LiL and other early childhood services were often not located in close proximity to families' homes. At the River Town site for example, most families lived a suburb away from their closest public primary school (and other services) because their local public primary school was demolished in 2012-13. This isolation, coupled with transport disadvantage meant that parents and their children had reduced opportunities to diversify and build their supplies of social, economic and cultural capitals, further compounding and reproducing social exclusion and disadvantage.

7.4.3. Social isolation

Overlapping families' geographic isolation, was their social isolation. Families in this study commonly reported that they had few friends, they found it difficult to trust people, and that they had scarce contact with others. Several participants were parenting alone, with little or no involvement from their children's other parent, or wider family support. Parents commonly reported that LiL provided an opportunity and a reason for them to 'get out of the house'. Moreover, LiL created opportunities for parents to get to know school staff and teachers, creating new relationships with people of 'higher' social positioning. These relationships were on the whole, experienced positively, and helped to build and diversify parents social and cultural capitals such that they could be leveraged for the benefit of their children, and themselves. The importance of supportive relationships at services is difficult to overstate. Supportive relationships help to provide both direct, and ameliorative effects

on parents' experience of stressors which are often heightened for parents living with socioeconomic disadvantage (Parkes et al., 2015). As a result, social and geographic isolation can be understood as mechanisms that reinforce, reproduce and compound families' low income, low status social positions through a lack of access to services and the opportunities that they confer for families to build positive relationships. The opportunities for parents to develop more diverse capitals (or build supplies of socially dominant capitals) may afford families more opportunities for upward social class mobility.

7.5. Complex lives

Families do not experience early childhood services separately from their day-to-day lives. What happens in families' homes and in other aspects of their life impacts on whether they attend LiL, how they get there, and how they understand and respond to people and activities.

Engagement with LiL was heavily shaped by parents' broader concerns and family circumstances. A significant proportion of participants in this study were living with complex, overlapping difficulties. Families' participation in early learning activities can be hampered by difficulties such as physical and mental health problems, housing difficulties, stress, emotional or physical abuse, criminality, and children with learning or behavioural challenges (Dockett, 2011). Whilst such barriers are not exclusive to people living on lower incomes, poorer families are more likely to be experiencing multiple and complex stressors (Perzow et al., 2018). This was recognised in the study by parents as well as LiL teachers. Complexity meant that parents were often compelled to direct their energies to the basic and immediate needs of their families, for example, keeping the electricity connected, making sure they had food for meals, and getting to medical appointments. Dealing with such concerns on a regular basis is stressful and is often made more time consuming by transport barriers. The result of this is that there is scarce time, physical or emotional energy left for parents to address more long-term issues such their children's social development and transition to schooling (Stern et al., 2015).

Complexity and isolation meant that many parents found starting LiL to be very anxiety provoking. It was common to hear parents speak of the need to be 'brave' about their first few visits to LiL. Connected to this, the importance of trust was evident throughout the

study. This was apparent in both explicit and implicit ways. This finding is widely supported in the existing literature (for example White et al. (2020)). LiL families who had developed trusting relationships with teachers were more likely to seek advice and support from them, and to engage with the program in more active ways. This finding is supported by the work of Benjamin (2019) who describes how the American program ParentChild+ supports and empowers parents:

It is nonintrusive and requires no mandatory tasks or requirements of parents except to be there... physically, mentally and socially. Parent engagement may happen in stages as the parent begins to trust the [facilitator] through consistent contact each week.

This inclusive approach responds to differences in capitals that exist between families. There are well recognised differences in the kinds of capitals that non-elite and elite status families possess and utilise to secure benefits. As already discussed, parents and their children in working class families tend to develop cultural capitals that are often different (but not inherently less valuable) than that of their more affluent counterparts (Lareau, 2011; Lo, 2015). Lareau (2011) notes for example, that children living in less privileged families often have more unstructured, free time than their more affluent peers. As a result, children in poorer families often develop greater independence, can entertain themselves more readily, and engage in more imaginative play.

As previously noted, middle-class families typically possess cultural, social and economic capitals that are congruent with the middle-class institutions, including schools (Bourdieu, 1987). These capitals in combination with their accompanying habituses, predispose those who inhabit the middle classes to engage with services (fields) in the preferred, dominant, and largely uninterrogated ways. Children from homes experiencing higher socioeconomic status, are likely to develop skills that are more socially dominant via a process Lareau refers to as ‘concerted cultivation’ (Lareau, 2011). Concerted cultivation occurs through children’s participation in extracurricular activities such as dancing or music lessons, or sporting clubs. These activities are valued in schools, and engagement in concerted cultivation supports the acquisition of socially dominant capitals and habituses which smooth children’s pathways through educational institutions.

Families living with socioeconomic disadvantage however, are often less able to participate in activities that promote this ‘concerted cultivation’ (Lareau 2011, Stirrup et al., 2015), and their habituses and tastes may mean that they also feel less inclined to do so. As a result, poorer families may be stigmatised, misunderstood, and devalued by institutions which are increasingly of the view that children’s participation in early learning activities are markers of ‘good’ parenting (Stirrup et al., 2015); or as Bourdieu (1977) argues they are delegitimised. This process sets up a lens through which parents’ practices and interactions with schools are problematised. Parents who are struggling with complex demands can be labeled as ‘unengaged’ or thought of as uncaring, and this was at times evident in the informal comments of teachers who were participants in this study. It is important then to begin a process of recognising unrecognised or undervalued cultural capitals, understanding class-based differences in habituses, and finding ways to establish a middle ground that truly supports and values families.

Institutions have enacted policies that promote improved awareness and better skills in understanding diversity in regard to ethnic or religious diversity for example. What is also needed is an awareness of diverse capitals, and a sincere respect for the ways these are developed, and the ways in which they have been unequally valued. Throughout this study, it was clear that complex lives, or types of capitals and habituses do not override or obscure parental love, care, or concern for children. Parents’ concern and care for their children was clear. Interviewees spoke about their concerns for their children as they transitioned away from home into schooling. Participants were eager for their child to feel happy, safe, and secure at school. When asked what was good about being a parent, responses were imbued with love and meaning:

There’s so much, so much ... It’s everything. It’s waking up and she’s smiling at you.

The smile and joy on their faces. The amazement that you’ve created that little person is just amazing... I don’t know – just – I can’t really explain it. Being a parent is one of the best things I have ever done in my life. It’s also the most challenging and hardest thing I’ve ever done in my life, but I’d never regret it...But I absolutely adore them.

This is more than sentimentality. Families living on low incomes often experience stigma and encounter stereotypes that situate them as being disinterested in the welfare of their children (Hamilton, 2012). While it is well established that children from backgrounds

impacted by socioeconomic deprivation experience multiple disadvantages this does not equate to a deficit of parental love or concern. This was evident throughout this study, with parents expressing deep love and care for their children.

7.6. Features of services

Another important element that influenced engagement with LiL was connected to how families experienced particular aspects of LiL, or service-based factors. For example, relationships with staff and other families at LiL were central to ongoing LiL attendance and participants widely reported that they valued LiL for the opportunities it afforded them for social interaction. Parents often developed strong bonds with one or more members of their LiL group, and made concerted efforts to stay connected outside of the LiL setting

As noted earlier, participants often said they ‘do not socialise much’, or ‘I prefer to keep to myself’. For some, this seemed connected to a general distrust of unknown people. For others, it reflected past trauma. Many parents reported feeling nervous about attending LiL at the beginning and spoke about the need to ‘find the courage’ to go along. This seemed to be particularly prevalent for fathers who were more likely to attend special events such as Father’s Day breakfasts, but less likely to feel comfortable attending regular LiL sessions which were primarily attended by mothers or female carers.

Regardless of gender, it was apparent that how parents perceived the quality of early visits shaped their ongoing engagement with LiL. When parents felt welcome and could identify some other parents or a staff member who was ‘like us’, they were more likely to revisit. One father for example, who had been very shy and initially reticent to engage, become a familiar face at LiL. He reported that this had developed over time as he had found that people were friendly and accepting of him and his children.

Tasmania’s rate of educational attainment is well below the national average. For example, 16.2% of the population hold Bachelor Degree or above, compared with 22 % nationally. Of particular relevance to this study, 17.4% of Tasmanian residents left school at Year Ten, compared with a national figure of 10.8% (ABS 2016c). Most parents in this study had low levels of educational attainment (see Chapter Four). This means that parents were less likely to possess the forms of cultural capital preferred in schools. Ollis et al. (2018) notes that aspects of cultural capital favored by educational institutions develop in part through the

processes of long-term schooling itself. This is one of the reasons then, that many parents did not commence visits to LiL with rich supplies of the kinds of cultural capital or a habitus traditionally valued in the school setting. However, teachers who took a less formal approach to engagement with parents and children, and who were able to deploy less dominant/elite cultural capitals were able to help parents feel at ease and form trusting and supportive relationships with and between families. This finding is congruent with Ollis et al. (2018) who observed that when learning environments were established with a cultural capital and habitus more familiar to lower income or lower social status participants, learners were more engaged and better able to achieve positive outcomes that conferred multiple social and educational benefits. Whilst LiL does not explicitly position parents as learners, there is a strong emphasis on teacher modelling and educating parents about the learning needs of young children. School readiness approaches widely acknowledge the importance of parents' school readiness, in supporting children's transitions and readiness. Moreover, as children share the habitus of their parents, it is likely that children receive some benefits from the same approach.

As with cultural capital, students from working-class or disadvantaged family backgrounds often have habituses and dispositions that are less congruent with that of the school setting (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977). This discord can stimulate the development of a more socially approved habitus and positive outcomes for some working-class students. However, it can also create feelings of deep unease, discomfort, and tension (Reay et al., 2009: 3). These children are disadvantaged in schooling from the outset, and a lack of alignment between the school and home habitus often presents obstacles throughout schooling. Students from working-class or disadvantaged backgrounds are far less likely to 'succeed' at school, and while this is largely attributable to them being a 'fish out of water', it is often understood as ineptitude for learning and academic endeavour. Subsequently, working class students are more likely to develop a feeling that school is 'not for us' and a negative view of education is replicated across generations (Reay et al., 2009).

Document analysis revealed the family centred focus of DoE information brochures. The documents examined overwhelmingly emphasised the role that families have in preparing children for schooling. Middle and upper-class cultural capitals were implicitly assumed and encouraged. This can have the unintentional effect of enacting symbolic violence, alienating

and intimidating those from working-class backgrounds, who before they have even attended LiL, may have received the message that it is not for 'people like us'. In doing so, schools may be inadvertently creating withdrawal and resistance. A Bourdieusian informed approach that is underpinned by an understanding of the arbitrary ways that particular (middle class) capitals become legitimised to the exclusion of others might create a more inclusive experience for families.

An example of this is the preference for less formal engagement with LiL expressed by some parents in this study. It was also evident that when pushed to engage with the LiL program in prescribed ways, some parents resisted or disengaged completely. This aligns with Lareau (2011), who argues that parents from more working class backgrounds show a preference for less structured parenting and learning (the accomplishment of natural growth). This is in contrast to the approach of middle-class parents and institutions which emphasis concerted cultivation. Concerted cultivation is arbitrarily given greater social legitimacy. However Lareau (2011) notes that there are learning benefits in both approaches. Under a natural growth perspective children "are given the flexibility to choose activities and playmates and to decide how active or inactive to be as they engage in these activities" (67). Perhaps there is value in considering a less structured approach to LiL sessions that allows children and their parents to engage with the setting, activities and teachers on their own terms.

7.7. Question Four: How do families and service providers explain the purposes of LiL and do they share the same understandings?

Parents and service providers generally shared similar understandings of the broad purposes of LiL. Responses from teachers and parents to questions regarding the purpose of LiL were frequently connected to school readiness. Parents and teachers alike saw the main goal of LiL as the development of social skills and school familiarisation for children. Teachers extended this skills development goal to parents as well. What sometimes differed between teacher and parents, were their opinions regarding how social relationships (social capital) should be developed- particularly in relation to social relationships between parents. Reflecting the key policy documents and DoE aims of LiL, some teachers emphasised a requirement for parents to be engaged with their children during activities in a one-on-one manner. At one site, this expectation was articulated in LiL promotional materials developed by the school. This meant that social interactions between parents

were somewhat restricted. Most participants seemed comfortable with this, however some parents expressed objections to this approach, with one participant ultimately withdrawing from LiL.

Parents and teachers shared a focus on the development of early academic skills through LiL attendance, although this concern was, for most, secondary to social development. Some teachers noted however, that children who have been regularly engaged with LiL routinely recorded better results on early measures of academic development, highlighting the implicit concern that teachers (and Western education systems more widely) have with testing and assessments. As detailed in Chapter Two, this perspective on school readiness and early testing reflects a neoliberal focus on psychologically informed, individualised understandings of early education.

Regardless of the approach, LiL attendance conferred opportunities for families to build social and cultural capital during their children's schooling. This seemed to be especially notable during off site activities, such as visits to farms or the town library. Bus rides and being out of the classroom setting often provided a more informal environment that eased interactions. From a Bourdieusian standpoint, these activities offered opportunities to enrich families' social and cultural capitals. This view is supported by the work of Lareau (2011) whose ethnographic studies highlight that families from non-elite backgrounds are often more comfortable in less formal settings. This reflects a habitus, social and cultural capitals background that is less at home in elite fields, but more familiar with the informal. The finding that LiL attendance supports the development of cultural capitals is supported by the work of (Dumais, 2009) whose investigation of participation in a range of cultural learning activities (including sporting, music, and art) indicated that children receive a range of benefits that are positively associated with improved school learning outcomes. When offered in a format with which parents feel comfortable, these activities may make a positive contribution to supporting diversified cultural capitals. Significantly, Dumais (2009) suggests that these benefits may support upward social mobility.

7.7.1. Resistance and symbolic violence.

Several parents reported feeling suspicious and uneasy with staff and services, who they perceived as being 'from the government'. This is congruent with the broader literature that

acknowledges families living with low SES experience discomfort with government services and employees. This discomfort may be at least in part, due to the experience of symbolic violence. Parents experiencing socioeconomic disadvantage are often acutely aware that they do not fit in well with schools. Teachers at schools in this study frequently talked about this, and they commented that many parents experiencing low SES have negative memories of their own schooling. Fostering greater recognition of diverse cultural capitals may reduce families' experiences of symbolic violence and subsequent resistance and withdrawal from services. Supporting this view, parents who were made to feel safe at LiL reported that they could approach teachers or other school staff for support and advice regarding their children and other family issues.

The Tasmanian Government has made some attempts to recognise diversity of backgrounds (and capitals, although not explicitly) through the provision of professional development training in the Family Partnership Model (FPM) (Day et al., 2015). The FPM is an internationally recognised framework for a range of professionals who are working with families (Day et al., 2015). According to its developers, the FPM can be used to manage and prevent difficulties related to numerous areas of family life, including parenting, mental ill-health, children's learning and development, psychosocial stress, and children's health (Day et al., 2015). The model is used in a variety of service environments that include child and adolescent mental health services, community health services, children's early years services, and schools (Day et al., 2015). The FPM seeks to help professionals work alongside families in positive ways. One key concept of the FPM is 'constructs', which it defines as broad social frameworks that can simultaneously support and constrict the choices and autonomy of individuals. In the FPM, constructs represent the individual level understandings, beliefs and ways of thinking that underpin actions, shape and prescribe choices, and ways of understanding (Day et al., 2015). Recognising the significance of personal history, constructs are presented as emerging from family background, culture and lived experiences. This training is a promising start; however, further consideration needs to be given to such 'constructs' held by teachers, school leaders and others who are in positions of power in school/family relationships. FPM tends to focus more on the constructs held by families, and less on those held by those in authority. As such there is scope for training that disturbs the taken-for-granted legitimacy of those constructs held by

teachers and school leaders. Without an explicit focus on the arbitrariness of what 'constructs' are valued and what are not, there remains a risk of problematising ideas and experiences that differ from the socially dominant. Moreover, system-wide change may be required to support staff in enacting this sort of approach.

As noted earlier, the importance of trust was evident throughout this study. When families felt genuinely safe, accepted, and valued they felt more able to trust schools and the teachers who facilitate services such as LiL. Many families in this study were experiencing multiple stressors and complexity that contributed to an initial distrust of teachers and schools (and government more generally). When trust was developed over time, parents were more likely to engage and remain connected to LiL. Correspondingly, when this was less successful, withdrawal was more likely. Trust not only supported attendance, but also meant that parents were more likely to speak to other parents or school staff about concerns they had about their children. This has obvious benefits for children and their families, who may otherwise miss out on opportunities for extra learning support or social interactions.

7.8. Habitus and capitals

Bourdieu's work contributed a sound, practical and flexible theoretical foundation to this study, and assisted in revealing the ways that parents interacted with the established structural organisation of 'the school'.

Bourdieu (1984: 101) demonstrated how the interrelated concepts of habitus and capitals shape social practice through the formula: (habitus) (capital) + field = practice. Reflecting this, LiL had the capacity to offer parents opportunities to broaden their portfolios of social and cultural capitals. LiL also conferred opportunities to support the growth of a 'secondary habitus' (Clarkin-Phillips, 2018) that was more congruent with the school setting. These opportunities may assist children and their parents to transition into the school field with some of the 'priming' (Nash, 1990) that creates a greater feeling of ease routinely encountered at home by more privileged children. Whilst this study was interested in habitus, capitals were more salient. Rather than habitus being less applicable, it is likely the result of the study design and approach, which revealed parents' interests in the opportunities for diverse learning experiences and relationships that LiL offered.

As discussed, cultural capital is often thought of in its socially dominant forms. This is at odds with Bourdieu's definitions of the term (Bourdieu, 1986). Social capital is far more diverse (Mischi, 2019). Schooling, however, often attempts to train or impart dominant cultural capitals and influence parents accordingly. This was evident throughout this study. Teachers spoke openly about needing to model appropriate school behaviours to parents as well as children, with specific statements and lessons being explicitly directed toward parents. Whilst this practice helps parents become more familiar with the 'rules of play' at school, Miller (2018) and DeGioia (2013) suggest schools should strive for greater respect of home cultures and should be more open to altering school practices in ways that better promote continuity between the home and school setting. In practice, this may be challenging, however it was evident in this study that there is scope for schools to increase their focus on being 'ready' for families, rather than a single focus on making families and children ready for school. This approach would support the ultimate aims of school readiness- smoothing transitions into schooling, but in ways that reduce symbolic violence and potentially promote greater engagement of low-income families with LiL (Miller, 2018). Further studies are needed to develop empirically sound data to inform policy that identifies school practices that best utilise families' diverse cultural resources.

Congruent with Bourdieu's view of social capital as the cumulative resources available from outside the family, and as a range of resources that arise from a "network of more or less institutionalised relationships" (Bourdieu, 1986: 248), LiL presented multiple opportunities for parents and their children to grow their supplies of social capital. Consistent with existing research (see for example Sincovich et al. (2020)) LiL made it possible for parents to make new connections with other parents at LiL. These social relationships helped to ease the impacts of isolation by expanding networks and helping parents to feel more embedded in their local community. The effects of this are likely to be enduring as most children continue their primary school education at the schools where they attend LiL. Social capital was further supported at LiL by creating opportunities for parents to become more at ease in a school setting, and to get to know teachers and other school staff. When trusting relationships were developed, parents were more likely to seek support from teachers when they were concerned about family matters, or aspects of their children's development. These are examples of supportive social relationships that parents can leverage to attain

specific goals, or to accumulate emotional or material resources that can be utilised in beneficial ways (Rogosic and Baranovic, 2016; Bourdieu, 1986). This can help ameliorate some of the effects of having low economic resources.

Importantly, this thesis highlights the need for early childhood education programs to constitute one intervention among many that seek to support young children and their families. The broader social problems such as low income, isolation, and social exclusion must not be overlooked in favour of neoliberal preferred approaches that locate the responsibility for perceived deficits with individuals.

This thesis extends the work of Bourdieu, and much of the more recent scholarly work that follows it, by applying his concepts to the expanding domain of early childhood education. Whilst there is a growing body of Bourdieusian informed early childhood education literature, much of this is concerned with teachers (for example Jackson, 2017; Nolan & Molla (2018)). There is a paucity of research available regarding parent's experiences. Moreover, amongst the literature that does exist, there is a tendency to focus on specific ethnic or First Nations populations. The community level focus of this study makes a contribution towards closing this gap and brings a Tasmanian perspective.

As fields such as neuroscience learn more about early childhood development, it is critical to embed those findings in a social perspective that avoids locating the origin of social problems in deficit models of brain development (Boyle, 2019: 454). This thesis connects to the recent Ireland based work of Boyle (2019) who argues that emerging early childhood education programs reflect a proliferation of new knowledges (including those arising from neuroscience) and practices...

through which the children and communities... are 'disciplined' ...through the provision of parenting programmes. In the discourse, the locus of the neurological problem is in poor parenting, not in any broader social context such as poverty, unemployment or poor housing therefore the remedy is in parental education (460)

This study highlights a paradox that exists in early childhood education. While early childhood education programs offer opportunities for positive learning and social interventions, there is also the problems of interventions enacting symbolic violence and delegitimising families' existing capitals. This contradiction is similarly observed in Pollard and Alexander's (2019) ethnographic examination of a music program for secondary school

students living with socioeconomic disadvantage. The researchers noted there was tension between “emancipatory aims” and the “sanctioning and championing of certain forms of dominant cultural practice” (309) that is inherent in such initiatives. This presents a challenge for policy makers and educators. There is more work to be done to incorporate an awareness of the potential for harm in early childhood education. There is a need to develop practices for engaging with families who use programs such as LiL, in ways that build upon families’ capitals, without delegitimising or diminishing them. It is evident from this study, that when this occurs, parents and their children are better positioned to garner the benefits that programs such as LiL can confer.

This work also extends the broader Bourdieusian focussed education literature, by examining the experiences of parents in early childhood education settings/schools. This is particularly important in early childhood education, as the role of parents is central. Parents’ experiences of early childhood education shape children’s opportunities to access it. When they experience early childhood education negatively, their children’s opportunities to receive the known benefits may be diminished. Therefore, it is crucial that parents’ experiences are considered, and understood. Moreover, fostering teachers’ understandings of resistance as a legitimate response to the experience of symbolic violence could offer scope for reconsidering ways of engaging with families. This would present a challenge to teachers (as well as school leaders, academics and policy makers) to engage in a process of professional learning through reflective practice.

7.9. Strengths and limitations

This study was part of a three-year funded partnership project. This meant that the study was able to utilise data from sites from several locations, that was collected as part of an extensive fieldwork period which allowed for repeat interviews with parents. Second interviews enabled member checking, and points made during first interviews could be expanded on or clarified. Participants were also able to be observed at sites enabling fieldnotes to add depth and richness to the data. The study design also supported extensive observation at sites and casual conversations with parents who were not formally part of the study.

Whilst this investigation examined the experiences and perspectives of parents who were using LiL in some capacity, the study was unable to capture the views of those families who were not using LiL at all. This was primarily due to the difficulties in recruiting such participants. Some participants however, were considered to be 'low engagement'. This status was reported by teachers in the study, and those families agreed that their participation in LiL had been very limited. Some teachers reported having families registered for LiL or 'on the books', but who did not attend more than once or twice a term. Some of these parents were participants.

There is a significant gender imbalance in the broader ECEC space (Peeters et al. 2015) and unsurprisingly, amongst the participants in this study. If we are to create ECEC services that provide optimal support to families, we must continue to reflect on ways to involve fathers and other male caregivers in ECEC. However this was outside the focus of this thesis, and the broader Tassie Kids study in which my research was situated.

As this research was carried out in two primary sites, it is not possible to generalise this study's findings across all LiL services. There are also likely to be differences in the ways that LiL is experienced by families depending on whether it is located in a CFC, or a school. There are important differences in how families connect to each service. Moreover, there are likely to be differences in the ways that families in this study use and experience LiL, in comparison with families who are connected to more affluent schools.

From a theoretical perspective as suggested by Grenfell (2009), there is a risk in becoming "too ensnared in Bourdieu's own conceptual language" (447). Even Bourdieu was mindful that his concepts were likely to be of limited value in terms of providing solutions to the problems they sought to highlight and explain. The value of Bourdieu's concepts to this study is their utility in exposing the mechanisms that are at work in creating and replicating systems of oppression. These systems serve to maintain the elevated social position of the dominant, whilst subjugating the dominated. This occurs through the delegitimisation of the practices, capitals and habituses of the working classes. It is evident then, that Bourdieu's well-established work on higher education is also applicable to the more recent development of early childhood education. If early childhood education is to fully realise its expressed aims of creating greater social equality, then these challenges must continue to be addressed. For challenges to be dealt with, they must first be known.

That is, whilst it is possible to identify how Bourdieu's concepts are applicable to this study, they are arguably less effective in identifying solutions to the problems they reveal. This is acknowledged as a possible weakness of this thesis. A potential solution to this problem, is what Bourdieu called a "metanoia" - a fundamental shift in ways of thinking that moves away from the enduring and "orthodox" patterns that inform ongoing social and educational policy. This however, is beyond the scope of this study.

Further research

Further research into the unrecognised cultural capitals of families fostering better understanding of unrecognised cultural capitals (that is, making them recognised and understood as legitimate), could give service providers and policy planners a more nuanced understanding of families who are not from the dominant social classes. Designing school programs that more fully understand, respond to, and build upon families' cultural capital assets, may help to reduce some of the "push back" or service avoidance that families exert when they experience symbolic violence or feeling of not belonging.

Greater recognition and revaluing of diverse capitals may offer a more socially just way to address differences between low SES families and schools. It is a focus that puts the onus on the more powerful party (schools and teachers) to respond to the needs of families, rather than expecting families to yield to the more dominant force, although families may develop more socially dominant capitals in the process. It means that schools are genuinely ready for families, rather than the full weight of readiness being borne by the less socially empowered.

A more deliberate adoption of a multi-part equation of school readiness (for example Ready families + Ready early childhood services + Ready communities + Ready schools = Ready children Kagan and Rigby (2003)) may better support engagement in LiL. By supporting the creation of a framework that shares the focus of early childhood school preparation between schools and families in a more explicit way, schools may be able to better respond to the complex influences on school readiness and early childhood development (Mashburn and Pianta, 2006).

Schools are more than sites for the education of children. Rather, they are a central 'hub' in communities, where a range of people, with their respective strengths and weakness,

converge. This means that if properly resourced, schools are well positioned to respond to the needs of families, thereby supporting the education and development of young children. LiL must be equipped with the resources and skills and flexibility to respond to parent's needs. This is especially important during the first visits families make to LiL, which are often uncomfortable for parents. Families may be entering sites as 'fish out of water', with different resources of social and cultural capitals. How parents perceived and experienced their first few visits was influential to their continued engagement.

One way this might be approached is by responding to some families' preferences for less formal learning styles and settings. The creation and expansion of opportunities for parents to interact informally with each other and children, both on and off school sites, may support parental engagement with early learning programs. While LiL emphasises that parents should engage with their children in prescribed activities at LiL, some parents expressed disagreement with this value. Additionally, parents did not always attend LiL with the explicit aim of engaging with their children. Rather, LiL provided opportunities for parents to engage with other parents. A way to address this might be to offer an alternative style of play-based program that is less structured. This recognises that schools are more than just places to educate children.

Future programs should be designed in ways that reflect a respect for diverse cultural capitals, and social and economic isolation. This does not need to involve radical change, but rather an approach that finds ways to incorporate more opportunities for families to engage with LiL and other services in less formal ways. Whilst Tasmania's CFCs offer a style of service delivery that fits this description, they exist in limited numbers and are not readily accessible to all Tasmanian families.

To support families using early childhood programs such as LiL, teacher training and professional development, greater provision of other support personnel (for example social workers or school psychologists) as well as broader educational policy need to reflexively deconstruct the structural constraints that operate to position working class families as outsiders in schools.

Chapter 8: Thesis Conclusion

There are three guiding aims to the research presented in this thesis:

1. To investigate how LiL is framed and positioned in government policy documents and the accounts of service providers.
2. Explore how parents from two communities experiencing socioeconomic disadvantage communities experience, use, and engage with LiL.
3. To sociologically analyse parent and service provider perspectives, and government policy documents about LiL.

To support the achievement of these aims, research was guided by four questions:

1. How does the Tasmanian Government describe and position LiL, and what are the problems that this service seeks to address?
2. How are families using LiL?
3. What are the key factors that shape families' use of and engagement with LiL?
4. How do families and service providers understand the purposes of LiL, and do they share the same understandings?

To address the research aims and questions and to consider LiL and early childhood education from different perspectives, this thesis used a multiple qualitative methods approach, utilising several sociological techniques. An ethnographically informed qualitative methodology that used the techniques of fieldwork, participant observation, formal and informal interviewing combined with vignettes, told the story of participants' experiences. This was combined with a Bacchian WPR policy analysis, highlighted the underlying assumptions and problems the Tasmanian Department of Education seeks to address through the provision of LiL and other early childhood education services. Further document analysis considered how the DoE communicates its aims to parents through the thematic analysis of parent information brochures. This process identified the key messages directed to parents of children using government primary schools in relation to early childhood, and early childhood education. In combination, these approaches generated a rich body of findings and interrelated themes.

Bourdieuian concepts of cultural capital, social capital, habitus and field were usefully applied to fieldnotes and interview transcripts to understand relations and practices in LiL services. The work of Bourdieu continues to provide an alternative to the traditional view amongst educational institutions that reduced success in schooling among people living with lower socioeconomic status stems from underlying academic ineptitude (Bourdieu, 1986).

The needs of families residing in communities experiencing disadvantage may be more diverse than those in affluent areas. There were numerous barriers to LiL engagement identified. Most of these stemmed from broader barriers to social participation, primarily underpinned challenges associated with low income. Isolation and complex (often stressful) family circumstances meant that some families found engagement with LiL difficult to sustain. Reflecting the importance of positive relationships in services, parents who did not feel comfortable with teachers or other families were more likely to disengage.

LiL performs multiple roles that extend far beyond educational goals. Families who regularly engaged with LiL reported wide ranging benefits that supported them in transitioning their children into schooling. Parents are more receptive to learning new skills and teacher's 'modelling' when they feel genuinely safe, accepted and valued for the strengths they bring to parenting and the service setting. Additionally, parents received much needed social support and contact with other parents and school staff that helped reduce the effects of isolation.

LiL makes a strong contribution to the lives of families and is valued by those who are engaged. Those who were 'less engaged' often encountered significant gaps between their own habitus, known fields, and capitals and those of schools. When teachers were skilled at interacting with parents in ways that made them feel more at ease, they created settings in which parents were responsive to learning new parenting skills.

It is not enough to tell parents why LiL is important, and why they should attend. Parents who participated in this study understood that LiL offered important benefits to their children. Additionally, for families who are experiencing isolation and compounding stressors/complexity, this messaging, without adequate support accompanying it, can be experienced as symbolic violence, leaving parents with the view that services are not for 'people like us' and prompt withdrawal and resistance.

Throughout this study the centrality of positive and supportive relationships between teachers and parents was clear. Teachers who were most adept at deploying a range of strategies to make families feel comfortable (reducing the fish-out-of-water experience), were viewed positively by parents. Whilst they used different terminology, school staff who were seen as non-judgmental, flexible, and caring often deployed non-elite cultural capitals. This approach smoothed families' entrances into the LiL, and broader school field and supported them in acquiring more diverse cultural capitals, including those traditionally more favoured within educational systems.

This thesis highlights the paradoxical relationship that exists between educational institutions and families who live with disadvantage. It is evident from the broad body of developmental studies, that the early years of children's lives are of central importance for their futures. Early childhood education is known to produce a range of benefits to children. It was strongly evident in this study, that when families were well integrated into LiL they received a range of benefits that smoothed the transitions of parents and their children into the education setting.

However, these benefits can be accompanied by drawbacks. As noted earlier, families using services can experience a delegitimisation of their capitals and symbolic violence. Some responded to this through a passive resistance to LiL messaging, non-engagement, or withdrawal from LiL. Consequently, this study highlights the need to further address the lived realities of symbolic violence in early childhood education. Scott (2012) observes that little has been written about symbolic violence in schools. Perhaps this is because the concept is uncomfortable. Teachers care about students and families and work to promote better outcomes for them. Symbolic violence, however, exposes what is usually an unintended, shadowy side of education that operates to exclude some families from the benefits of early childhood education, further entrenching the effects of disadvantage. This thesis makes an empirical contribution towards addressing this research gap and highlights the need for further research into the ways that symbolic violence occurs in early childhood education, in the process of acting on the well-intentioned aim of creating school ready children.

This thesis contributes to knowledge in multiple ways. It provides an empirical and theoretical contribution to the sociology of education to understand how parents living in

communities experiencing high levels of socioeconomic disadvantage engage with early childhood education. This insight supports understandings of why families living in lower SES communities may be less likely to engage with early childhood education programs than families living in more affluent areas. By positioning the views of parents as central, this thesis contributes new data that informs understanding of what it is about services such as LiL that parents value or are dissuaded by. This is important as parents are the means by which children can access early childhood education. Therefore, better understandings of parent's experiences can underpin the design of services to maximise chances for children to attain the benefits of early childhood education.

To better and more fully support parents and children living with disadvantage into and through early childhood education services, and to “draw out the full range of *possibilities which are available for action*” (Bourdieu 1993a, 145) it is essential to increasingly consider and integrate parents perspectives with sociological research into early childhood policy and service design.

Appendix 1: Family Participant Information Sheet



Family Experiences of early childhood services in Tasmania,

Tassie Kids

Families Information Sheet

What is this study about?

The study is about Tasmanian families and their experiences of early childhood services and supports provided by the Tasmanian Education and Health Departments (e.g. Child Health Nurse visits, Launching into Learning). Family experiences will be collected through observation, informal and formal interviews with parents, grandparents, carers or guardians who use these services regularly and those who do not often use these services. Families may include parents, grandparents or legal guardians who are looking after one pre-school age child.

Who is conducting the study?

The researchers responsible for this study are Professor Cate Taylor, Professor Stephen Zubrick and Dr Joel Stafford from the Telethon Kids Institute, Dr Emily Hansen, Professor Alison Venn and Dr Kim Jose from the University of Tasmania, Professor David Preen from the University of Western Australia and Rachel Jones, PhD student at the University of Tasmania. The study is being conducted in partnership with the Department of Education, Department of Health and Human Services and Department of Premier and Cabinet. The study is funded by the National Health and Medical Research Council of Australia.

Who is conducting the field work and interviews?

The field work and interviews will be conducted by Dr Emily Hansen, Dr Kim Jose, Dr Joel Stafford, Dr Susan Banks and Rachael Jones.

What is the purpose of the study?

The study aims to understand how Tasmanian families use early childhood health and education services such as child health nurses and Launching into Learning and what impact using these services has on your child, children, grandchildren or children in your care. The study gives parents, grandparents, carers and guardians a voice that can be used to improve services and supports for pre-school age children in the future.

Why have I been invited to take part in the study?

We are inviting Tasmanian families with young children to take part in the study.

What will I be asked to do?

Fieldwork: The researchers will attend services such as Launching into Learning, Child health clinics or Child and Family Centres. They will spend time watching and talking with parents,

grandparents, carers, guardians and service providers. They may also get involved with some activities. The researchers will write down notes about what they have learnt. **If you are not happy for researchers to observe you during any early childhood activity over the course of the study, then it may be best not to enrol in this study.**

If you decide at any time during the study that you would prefer not to be observed on a specific occasion, then the researchers will either not conduct observations at this activity or will not make any notes about you. At all times your wishes will guide the researcher(s).

Formal Interviews: Some families will be invited to participate in an interview with Kim, Rachael, Susan or Emily about the child services they have used in the past and/or are currently using and whether these services were helpful or not. Let us know if you would like to be involved in this. Each interview is expected to take approximately an hour.

Because we are interested in how things change as children grow, we would like to interview some families twice over an 18 month period. These interviews will happen at a time and place that suits your family. Interviews will happen in a location that suits you best. For example, a child and family centre, in a park, at playgroup, at school, at a child health centre or in your own home. You can choose whether you want to take part in only one or all three interviews. During the interview, you will be invited to answer a set of questions about early childhood services and supports such as Launch into Learning or visits to the child health nurse. You do not have to answer any question that you do not want to answer. The interview will be audio-recorded, and some written notes will also be taken. If you say something that you do not want recorded, just let Emily, Kim or Rachael know during the interview.

Are there any possible benefits from taking part in this study?

Families will have an important say in how services are delivered to families and the community as a whole.

Families who are interviewed formally will receive a \$50 supermarket voucher for their time.

Are there any possible risks from taking part in the study?

A possible risk of taking part in the study is feeling uncomfortable or upset. The interviews questions are not intended to upset you, but they may raise sensitive issues about parents, children and families. If you feel distressed, we encourage you to contact:

1. Centre Leader at the Child and Family Centre
2. Your GP
3. Lifeline <http://www.lifeline.org.au/Get-Help/Facts---Information/Lifeline-Services/Lifeline-Services> or 13 11 14
4. Relationships Australia – Tasmania <http://www.tas.relationships.org.au/> or 1300 364 277

What if I change my mind during or after the study?

Taking part in the study is voluntary. If you do not want to take part in the study, it will not affect any services and supports that you and your family receive now or in the future in any way. If you join the study, you may withdraw at any stage. If you change your mind during an interview, the interview will finish, and we will not use anything that you have said. You can tell us you do not want to use any information you have already provided.

What will happen to the study information when the study is over?

Study information will be stored securely at the University of Tasmania, School of Social Science and Menzies Institute for Medical Research for 5 years from the first date of publication. Only authorised members of the research team will have access to the study data. Personal information is managed in accordance with the requirements of the Personal Information Protection Act 2004.

How will the results of the study be published?

We will also present the results of the research in different ways. This may be talks in your community, reports for early childhood services as well as public talks, for example, at conferences. When we write and talk about the results of this study, we combine information from individuals, so it is not possible to identify any individual who took part. The study results are presented as group results not individual results.

What if I have questions about the study?

If you would like to be involved with this study or to discuss any aspect of this study, please contact:

1. Dr Emily Hansen (Senior Lecturer, School of Social Science, University of Tasmania).
Phone (03) 6226 1782. Email: emily.hansen@utas.edu.au
2. Dr Kim Jose (Post-Doctoral Research Fellow, Menzies Institute for Medical Research).
Phone (03) 6226 7835. Mobile: 04.. Email: kim.jose@utas.edu.au
3. Rachael Jones (PhD Candidate, School of Social Science, University of Tasmania).
Mobile: 047..... .. Email: rachael.jones@utas.edu.au

All research in Australia that involves people is reviewed by an independent group of people called a Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC). This survey has been approved by the Tasmanian Health and Medical Research Ethics Committee. If you have concerns or complaints about the conduct of this study, you should contact the Executive Officer of the HREC (Tasmania) Network on (03) 6226 7479 or email human.ethics@utas.edu.au. The Executive Officer is the person nominated to receive complaints from research participants. You will need to quote ethics approval number H0016195.

This Information Sheet is yours to keep.

Appendix 2: Family Participant Consent Form



Family Experiences of Early Childhood Services and Supports

Tassie Kids

Consent Form

1. I agree to take part in the research study named above.
2. I have read and understood the Information Sheet for this study.
3. The nature and possible effects of the study have been explained to me.
4. I understand that the study involves me taking part in a series of informal and formal one-to-one interviews over a period of 18 months as well as observation during early childhood activities.
5. I understand that the formal interviews will be audio-recorded and later written up. I will have the opportunity to review the written record of interviews if I choose to. During the interview I can let the researchers know if I say anything that I do not want to be part of the written record.
6. I understand that researchers will spend time observing and chatting to me and my family when I go to services such as Launching into Learning, Child Health Clinics or Child and Family Centres. They may join in with some activities. I understand that the researchers may take notes during and after informal interviews and observation of early childhood activities.
7. I understand that participation involves the risk of feeling discomfort. I understand that the interview questions are not intended to cause distress, but may raise sensitive issues about myself, my children and my family. I understand that I can get support if I feel distressed.
8. I understand that all research data will be securely stored on the Menzies Institute for Medical Research and School of Social Science, University of Tasmania premises for five years from the publication of the study results, and will then be destroyed unless I give permission for my data to be stored in an archive.
I agree to have my study data archived.

Yes ☐ No ☐

9. Any questions that I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction.
10. I understand that the researchers will keep the study information confidential and secure and that any information I provide will only be used for the purposes of the research.
11. I understand that the results of the study will be published so that I cannot be identified as a participant. I understand that when the researchers write and talk about the results of this study, the information from individual parents will

be combined so that is not possible to identify any individual parents who took part in the interviews. I understand that the results will include quotes that do not identify individual participants.

12. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw from taking part in an interview without giving a reason. I understand that if I do not want to take part in the study, it will not affect any services and supports that I or my family receive now or in the future, in any way.

13. I understand that I can withdraw permission for my information to be used.

I agree to take part in (please tick):

☐ One-to-one Interview

Participant's name: _____

Participant's signature: _____

Participant's telephone number: _____

Date: _____

Statement by Investigator

☐

I have explained the project and the implications of participation in it to this volunteer and I believe that the consent is informed and that he/she understands the implications of participation.

If the Investigator has not had an opportunity to talk to participants prior to them participating, the following must be ticked.

☐

The participant has received the Information Sheet where my details have been provided so participants have had the opportunity to contact me prior to consenting to participate in this project.

Investigator's name: _____

Investigator's signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix 3: Service Provider Information Sheet



Tassie Kids

Service Providers Information Sheet

What is this study about?

The study is about early childhood services and supports provided by the Tasmanian government through the Department of Education and Department of Health and Human Services. This study is part of a program of work that has been developed as a partnership between policy makers in the Departments of Health & Human Services (DHHS), Education and Premier and Cabinet and researchers at the Telethon Kids Institute (WA) and the University of Tasmania, to better understand how the early childhood service system is operating in Tasmania.

We are interested in understanding more about how families understand and engage with the service system, how the services operate, how the services work with families and with each other and reasons why families do and do not engage with services. Service provider's experiences will be collected through observation and interviews.

Who is conducting the study?

The researchers responsible for this study are Professor Cate Taylor, Professor Stephen Zubrick and Dr Joel Stafford from the Telethon Kids Institute, Dr Emily Hansen, Professor Alison Venn and Dr Kim Jose from the University of Tasmania, Professor David Preen from the University of Western Australia and Rachel Jones, PhD student at the University of Tasmania. The study is being conducted in partnership with the Department of Education, Department of Health and Human Services and Department of Premier and Cabinet. The study is funded by the National Health and Medical Research Council of Australia.

Who is conducting the field work and interviews?

The field work and interviews will be conducted by Dr Emily Hansen, Dr Kim Jose, Dr Joel Stafford, Dr Susan Banks and Rachael Jones.

What is the purpose of the study?

The study aims to understand the how early childhood service providers are working with Tasmanian families and other early childhood service providers from different sectors. The study gives service providers a voice that can be used to improve services and supports in the future. The study has been endorsed by heads of agency and service managers.

Why have I been invited to take part in the study?

We are inviting early childhood service providers working in health and education to take part in the study. You have been invited because you currently provide early childhood

services in [insert name] community. Your experiences will represent the voices of service providers.

What will I be asked to do?

Fieldwork: The researchers will spend time at early childhood health and education services. At times this may include in-house activities such as professional development or team meetings. Researchers will also spend time watching and talking with service providers during activities with families and may get involved with some activities where appropriate. The researchers will write down notes about their observations. **If you are not happy for researchers to observe you during early childhood activities over the course of the study, then it may be best not to enroll in this study.**

If you decide at any time during the study that you would prefer not to be observed on a specific occasion, then the researchers will not conduct observations at this activity or will not make any notes about you. At all times your wishes will guide the researcher(s).

Formal Interviews: Some service providers will be invited to participate in an interview with Kim, Rachael, Susan, or Emily about the services they provide. Let us know if you would like to be involved in this. We expect an interview to last approximately an hour.

Because we are interested in how things change over time, we would like to interview some service provider more than once (a maximum of three times over an 18-month period). These interviews will happen at a time and place that suits you, for example your workplace, a child and family centre, a child health centre, the school or an alternative location of your choosing. You can choose whether you want to take part in only one or all three interviews. During the interview, you will be invited to answer a set of questions about early childhood services and supports. You do not have to answer any question that you do not want to answer. The interview will be audio-recorded, and some written notes will also be taken. If you say something that you do not want recorded, just let Emily, Kim or Rachel know during the interview.

Are there any possible benefits from taking part in this study?

A possible benefit is that we will find out what service providers think about the current early childhood system in Tasmania and factors that impact on service delivery. This means that service providers will have an important say in how services are delivered to families and the community as a whole.

Are there any possible risks from taking part in the study?

A possible risk of taking part in the study is feeling some discomfort. The interview questions are not intended to cause discomfort, but may raise sensitive issues about your professional practice, parents, children and families. If you feel distressed, we encourage you to talk to:

1. Service manager
2. Employment Assistance Provider

What if I change my mind during or after the study?

Taking part in the study is voluntary. You do not have to take part in the study. It is your choice and you do not have to give us any reason. If you do not want to take part in the study, it will not affect your role in the service delivery team now or in the future, in any way. If you change your mind during the interview, the interview will finish, and we will not use anything that you have said.

What will happen to the study information when the study is over?

Study information will be stored securely at the University of Tasmania, School of Social Science and Menzies Institute for Medical Research for 5 years from the first date of publication. Only authorised members of the research team will have access to the study data. Personal information is managed in accordance with the requirements of the Personal Information Protection Act 2004.

How will the results of the study be published?

We will also present the results of the research in different ways. This may be talks in your community, reports for early childhood services as well as public talks, for example, at conferences. When we write and talk about the results of this study, we combine information from individual parents, so it is not possible to identify any individual parents who took part. The study results are presented as group results not individual results.

What if I have questions about the study?

If you would like to discuss any aspect of this study, please contact:

4. Dr Emily Hansen (Senior Lecturer, School of Social Science, University of Tasmania).
Phone (03) 6226 1782. Email: emily.hansen@utas.edu.au
5. Dr Kim Jose (Post-Doctoral Research Fellow, Menzies Institute for Medical Research).
Phone (03) 6226 7835. Mobile: 04.. Email: kim.jose@utas.edu.au
6. Rachael Jones (PhD Candidate, School of Social Science, University of Tasmania).
Mobile: 0477 236 938. Email: rachael.jones@utas.edu.au

All research in Australia that involves people is reviewed by an independent group of people called a Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC). This survey has been approved by the Tasmanian Health and Medical Research Ethics Committee. If you have concerns or complaints about the conduct of this study, you should contact the Executive Officer of the HREC (Tasmania) Network on (03) 6226 7479 or email human.ethics@utas.edu.au. The Executive Officer is the person nominated to receive complaints from research participants. You will need to quote ethics approval number H0016195.

This Information Sheet is yours to keep.

Appendix 4: Service Provider Consent Form



Early Childhood Service Providers

Tassie Kids

Consent Form

1. I agree to take part in the research study named above.
2. I have read and understood the Information Sheet for this study.
3. The nature and possible effects of the study have been explained to me.
4. I understand that the study involves me taking part in a series of informal and formal one-to-one interview over a period of 18 months.
5. I understand that the formal interviews will be audio-recorded and later transcribed. I will have the opportunity to review the written record of interviews if I choose too. During the interview I can let the researchers know if I say anything that I do not want to be part of the written record.
6. This study includes the use of participant observation. Researchers will spend time observing and talking to me during activities with families as well as during activities with other service providers (e.g. professional development or team meetings). Researchers may also get involved with some activities where appropriate. I understand that the researchers may take notes during and after informal interviews and observation of early childhood activities.
7. I understand that participation involves the risk of feeling discomfort. I understand that the interview questions are not intended to cause distress, but may raise sensitive issues about my professional practice, families and children. I understand that I can get support if I feel distressed.
8. I understand that all research data will be securely stored on the Menzies Institute for Medical Research and School of Social Science, University of Tasmania premises for five years from the publication of the study results, and will then be destroyed unless I give permission for my data to be stored in an archive.
I agree to have my study data archived.
Yes ☐ No ☐
9. I understand that the study information will be kept confidential and secure at the University of Tasmania for a minimum of 5 years after the results have been published. After 5 years, the study information will be destroyed confidentially, so it cannot be recovered.
10. Any questions that I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction.
11. I understand that the researchers will keep the study information confidential and secure and that any information I provide will only be used for the purposes of the research.

12. I understand that the results of the study will be published so that I cannot be identified as a participant. I understand that when the researchers write and talk about the results of this study, the information from individual parents will be combined so that is not possible to identify any individual parents who took part in the interviews. I understand that the results will include quotes that do not identify individual participants.

13. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw from taking part in an interview without giving a reason. I understand that if I do not want to take part in the study, it will not affect any services and supports that I or my family receive now or in the future, in any way.

14. I understand that I can withdraw permission for my information to be used.

I agree to take part in (please tick one):

☐ One-to-one Interview

Participant's name: _____

Participant's signature: _____

Participant's telephone number: _____

Date: _____

Statement by Investigator

☐

I have explained the project and the implications of participation in it to this volunteer and I believe that the consent is informed and that he/she understands the implications of participation.

If the Investigator has not had an opportunity to talk to participants prior to them participating, the following must be ticked.

☐

The participant has received the Information Sheet where my details have been provided so participants have had the opportunity to contact me prior to consenting to participate in this project.

Investigator's name: _____

Investigator's signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix 5: Interview Schedule, Families, Interview One

Interview Schedule Families (interview one) May 2017

Standard demographic details – participant information sheet (Ask of complete beginning of interview)

Section 1

1. Can you tell me a bit about your family?
Prompts = who is in it, how many children, ages, any health or educational issues
2. How long have you lived here?
3. Can you tell me a bit about the joys and trials of being a parent?
4. Who or where would you get the most help or support from as a parent?
5. Have you ever had any concerns about your child/children's health or language and physical development? If yes where did you go for help and support? If no where would they go to for help or support
6. Can you tell me what early childhood health and educational services are you currently using for each child aged under 6?
7. What and who do you think these services are for? (Prompt Dads/men too?)
8. What services have you used in the past for each child when they were younger? E.g. GP, playgroup, childcare, child health centre/nurses, child and family centre.

Section 2

We will now ask some more specific questions about services such as LiL and Kindergarten. [Take each one in turn and ask them about their experiences with it, their expectations about its purpose, their experiences of it and *how they currently use or have used it in the past?*]

e.g. Can you tell me about your experiences using LiL? What was your understanding of the purpose of LiL? How did you find it? DO you still use it? Did you use it with other children?

OR

Can you tell me about your experiences using X service? How you would describe these services to a parent who had never used them before?

Anything else you want to say about X before we talk about next Z service?

Note: If they indicate they don't use services – rarely if ever then go to section 4

9. Ask parents which of these services they have the strongest opinion about? if negative, explore, if positive explore.
10. Can you give me an example of when X has been helpful/important/what you wanted/needed?
11. Can you give an example of when X was not helpful/what you wanted/needed etc
12. When they talk about not using something, see if they can expand on reasons why

Section 3

13. How has your service use changed over time and with additional children?
14. Impact of service mode, distance, aspects of place on service use (e.g. transport, availability of appointments, need to make appointments etc).
15. Do you ever prioritise health services over education services or vice versa?
16. Opinion on lower school starting age.

Section 4

1. Did you ever want to use some of these services and didn't? Can you tell me a bit more about that?
2. If not already asked and explored - What and who do you think these services are for?

Appendix 6: Interview Schedule, Families, Interview Two

Tassie Kids - Parent Interview Two

A. Follow up from Interview 1

In the first interview you talked about (Three key things from interview 1) could you tell me a bit more about that?

B. The purpose of early childhood?

Key tasks/skills that children learn in the preschool years?

Align with the AEDC topics of

1. Physical health and wellbeing
2. Language and competence
3. Social competence
4. Communication/general knowledge
5. Emotional maturity

How do children gain these skills?

What is your role in this?

The term 'school ready' is used a lot for young children, what does this mean for you?

C. Role and purpose of parents in the preschool years? How do they support children to develop the skills identified in the discussions from A?

e.g. Job Description/statement of duties?

1. Key tasks/skills necessary
2. Knowledge required
3. Good enough parenting

How/where do parents go to gain these?

How/where do you get support for these?

Do you feel that you have the skills/are equipped to support your children with this?

Role of services in assisting with the development of knowledge, skills, capacity, confidence required?

Appendix 7: Interview Schedule, Service Providers

Interview Guide Service Providers (interview one) May 2017

Standard demographic questions and basic details about their job – participant information sheet.

1. Can you tell me about (name of service), its purpose and their role in the service?
 - a. Prompts - meaning, history important in this, different models of care?
2. How long have you been involved in this early childhood service?
 - a. What have they done before? What drew you to working here?
3. What do you consider the primary role of your service?
4. Can you tell us what it is like working in this place? (i.e. suburb/community, also this building, CFC, school etc)
5. In general, how does the service engage with families? What they do, how they do it.
Follow-up: How do you personally engage with families in your role? How does it engage with Dads?
6. Can you tell me about a time when things have worked well with a family or parent/carer in terms of engagement and the service?
7. Can you tell me about a time when things did not work as well as you hoped with a family or parent/care in terms of engagement and the service?
8. People talk about doing Outreach or engaging the hard to reach – how does this work for you/what does this look like for you?

Next questions focus on integration

Optional – may be more appropriate for non-CFC based workers:

How is the collaboration between you, your service and other early childhood services working?

9. Some people talk about having an integrated early childhood service system. What would an integrated early childhood service system look like/mean to you?
10. What elements currently exist in your workplace?
11. What do you think are the greatest challenges to working in this way?
12. What impact does co-location (e.g. CFC) have on this? OR What is the purpose of co-location of early childhood services?

To consider:

- Evidence/ information used and how?
- Scope of service, models
- System/staff turnover
- Models (e.g. co-location, other)
- Lower school starting age? (Education)
- Family Partnership training?

Appendix 8: Site Research Poster

This service is currently involved in a research study of early childhood health and education services in Tasmania.



**Researchers from this study may be on site.
If you have any questions about this, please ask us the
staff**

Page | 217

Appendix 10: Parent Information Brochure, Starting Kindergarten (Artefact 2)

LEARNING SERVICES

All schools belong to a Learning Service. These are located in regions throughout Tasmania.

LEARNING SERVICES (NORTH)

2 Invermay Road, Inveresk 7250
Phone: (03) 6336 2594 Fax: (03) 6334 3350
Email: Learning.Services.north@education.tas.gov.au

LEARNING SERVICES (NORTH-WEST)

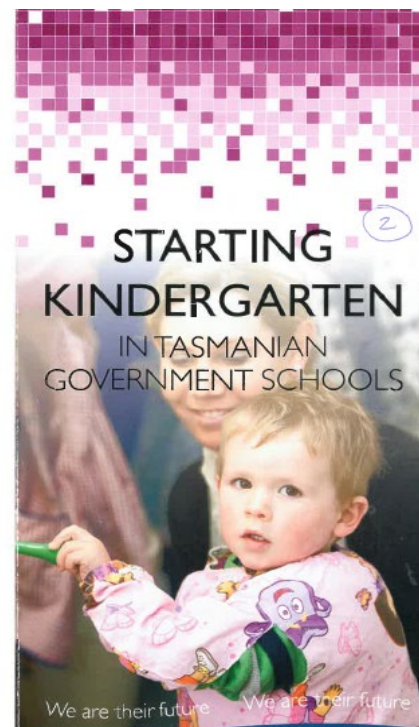
60 Wilmot Street, Burnie 7320
Phone: (03) 6434 6389 Fax: (03) 6431 8085
Email: Learning.Services.NW@education.tas.gov.au

LEARNING SERVICES (SOUTH)

213 Cambridge Road, Warrane 7018
Phone: (03) 6212 3119 Fax: (03) 6212 3111
Email: Learning.Services.S@education.tas.gov.au

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Published: October 2013



Department of Education



WHY IS KINDERGARTEN IMPORTANT?

- Kindergarten is a valuable experience for children. Young children learn an enormous amount between birth and age 5. The skills and values learnt in the first few years of life stay with children forever and affect their ability to learn and succeed for the rest of their lives.

WHAT HAPPENS AT KINDERGARTEN?

- At Kindergarten children
- Learn through play and activities planned by the teacher.
 - Play with other children and discover, create, improvise and imagine.
 - Test out their ideas, ask questions and expand their thinking.
 - Will use a wide range of equipment specially designed to support their learning.
 - Spend time playing and learning as part of small and large groups and on their own.

- Will learn independence, confidence and skills for getting along with others.
- Develop literacy and numeracy skills and learn about the world around them.

WHEN AND WHERE DOES YOUR CHILD GO TO KINDERGARTEN?

- Kindergartens are part of a primary school and students are taught by a registered teacher.
- If your child is four years old on 1 January in any year they can go to Kindergarten.
- Your child will attend Kindergarten for 15 hours a week.
- Sessions may be half day or full day depending on the school.
- Schools also offer early years' programs to support families and young children's learning and the transition to school. These include Birth to 5 initiatives, *Launching into Learning*, and pre-Kindergarten sessions. Parents and children attend these sessions together.

CAN YOUR CHILD GO TO KINDERGARTEN BEFORE THEY TURN FOUR?

- Children who are formally identified as gifted may be eligible to start Kindergarten early – and they must be aged at least three years and six months as of 1 January in the year in which they will start.
- If you are seeking early Kindergarten enrolment because your child is gifted you must notify the principal of the school by the last Friday in August (mid-term 3) of the year prior to enrolment to allow time for assessment of the application.
- Early entry may also be permitted for a child who has previously been enrolled in a school in another state or territory and who now resides in Tasmania.
- Visit the Department of Education website: www.education.tas.gov.au *Frequently Asked Questions and Early Entry for Gifted Students Application Form*.

WHERE CAN YOU GET MORE INFORMATION?

- Contact your local school.
- Visit the Department of Education website: www.education.tas.gov.au



Appendix 11: Parent Information Brochure, Get Involved in Your Child's Education (Artefact 3)

- The Tasmanian Association of State School Organisations (TASSO) is the peak body representing all Tasmanian Government school parents.
- It publishes brochures on ways you can support your child at school, as well as a bi-monthly newsletter, **Parent Contact**, which is available through the TASSO website www.parentsandfriendstasmania.asn.au

TIPS FOR STARTING CONVERSATIONS WITH YOUR CHILD

- Ask about their friends.
- Ask about their day at school; what was exciting? what did you learn?
- Read books with them.
- Talk about activities, crafts or projects happening at school.

WHERE CAN YOU GET MORE INFORMATION?

- Talk to your child's teacher or principal about how you can get involved in your child's education.
- Enquire at your child's school about being part of the School Association.
- Contact the TASSO www.parentsandfriendstasmania.asn.au to see how you can get involved.

LEARNING SERVICES

All schools belong to a Learning Service. These are located in regions throughout Tasmania.

LEARNING SERVICES (NORTH)

2 Invermay Road, Inveresk 7250
Phone: (03) 6336 2594 Fax: (03) 6334 3350
Email: Learning.Services.north@education.tas.gov.au

LEARNING SERVICES (NORTH-WEST)

60 Wilmot Street, Burnie 7320
Phone: (03) 6434 6389 Fax: (03) 6431 8085
Email: Learning.Services.NW@education.tas.gov.au

LEARNING SERVICES (SOUTH)

213 Cambridge Road, Warrane 7018
Phone: (03) 6212 3119 Fax: (03) 6212 3111
Email: Learning.Services.S@education.tas.gov.au

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Published: October 2013



Department of Education



DID YOU KNOW?

- Research shows that children do better at school when their parents are involved in their education.
- Being involved in your child's education adds to their school experience and sends a clear message that their education is important to you.
- There are many ways that you can be involved in your child's education.



WHAT CAN YOU DO TO BE INVOLVED?

- Some parents like to volunteer at the school by participating in classroom activities, in the canteen, supervising excursions or being an active member of the Parents and Friends or School Association.
- For many parents, volunteering in school hours is not an option because of work or having young children at home, but there are still plenty of ways to support and encourage your child's learning.
- Taking an active interest in your child's day is a great way to understand what's happening at school and how your child is feeling socially and academically.
- This can be as easy as asking 'what did you learn at school today?' or 'how was your day?'
- Other ways to get involved may include asking your child to help write the grocery list or add up some numbers, help with directions to the shopping centre or to remember where you parked the car.
- Involving children in day-to-day tasks and asking them to remember, contribute to or make decisions can be a great way to show them how their learning in school will help them complete various tasks in life.
- Improve your own skills to help support your child's learning.

SCHOOL ASSOCIATIONS

- All government schools in Tasmania have a School Association.
- The School Association provides parents, staff, students and other members of the community with a way to be involved in issues important to the school.
- School Associations help schools in a number of ways, such as organising fundraising, participating in developing school policy, advising on school management and approving the budget.
- When your child starts school, you are automatically a member of the School Association. School Association committees meet at least four times a year and all parents are welcome to attend.
- Contact information is available from your school.

PARENT GROUPS

- Many schools also have groups specifically for parents and carers, such as Parents and Friends groups. This is a great way to meet other parents and find out how you can contribute to your school community.



Appendix 12: Parent Information Brochure, Ready to Start School Checklist (Artefact 4)

LEARNING SERVICES

All schools belong to a Learning Service.
These are located in regions throughout Tasmania.

LEARNING SERVICES (NORTH)

2 Invermay Road, Inveresk 7250
Phone: (03) 6336 2594 Fax: (03) 6334 3350
Email: Learning_Services.north@education.tas.gov.au

LEARNING SERVICES (NORTH-WEST)

60 Wilmut Street, Burnie 7320
Phone: (03) 6434 6389 Fax: (03) 6431 8085
Email: Learning_Services.NW@education.tas.gov.au

LEARNING SERVICES (SOUTH)

213 Cambridge Road, Warrane 7018
Phone: (03) 6212 3119 Fax: (03) 6212 3111
Email: Learning_Services.S@education.tas.gov.au

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Email: marketing@education.tas.gov.au
Web: www.education.tas.gov.au
Published: October 2013



Department of Education



DID YOU KNOW?

- The Department of Education wants all children and their families to have the best possible start to the school year. There are things that you can do to help make sure your child is as prepared as possible for their first day of school.

WHERE CAN YOU GET MORE INFORMATION?

- Visit the Department of Education website: www.education.tas.gov.au



EARLY ON

- ☐ Attend school orientation
- ☐ Ensure your child's immunisations are up to date
- ☐ Have your child's hearing and eyesight checked
- ☐ If your child has an allergy, medical condition, takes medication or has any additional support needs, inform the school as early as possible and make an appointment to see the principal
- ☐ Think about how your child will be getting to school
- ☐ Practice walking or travelling to school
- ☐ Organise out of school hours care

SOMETHINGS YOU MIGHT NEED TO BUY

- ☐ School uniform (summer, winter, sports)
- ☐ Hat (usually part of school uniform)
- ☐ School shoes, socks and running shoes (try velcro straps if your child can't tie laces)
- ☐ Backpack
- ☐ Lunch box (have your child choose one they can open)
- ☐ Water bottle
- ☐ Raincoat
- ☐ Paint shirt (an old t-shirt will do)
- ☐ Library bag

OVER THE HOLIDAYS

- ☐ Get organised at home
- ☐ Write your child's name on everything
- ☐ Make sure you have the school's phone number
- ☐ If you have a son, make sure he knows how to use a urinal

THE NIGHT BEFORE

- ☐ Lay out your child's clothes, shoes and socks
- ☐ Make your child's recess and lunch and pop it in the fridge
- ☐ Help your child pack their school bag
- ☐ Pack a spare set of clothes in a plastic bag in case of accidents

THE FIRST DAY

- ☐ Be confident with your child about the first day
- ☐ Let your child dress themselves as much as possible
- ☐ Tie back or plait long hair
- ☐ Apply sunscreen and take a hat
- ☐ Take photos!
- ☐ Pick up your child on time

WE ARE THEIR FUTURE WE ARE THEIR FUTURE WE ARE THEIR FUTURE WE ARE THEIR FUTURE WE ARE THEIR FUTURE

READY TO START SCHOOL CHECKLIST IN TASMANIAN GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS

Appendix 13: Parent Information Brochure, At What Age Does My Child Start/Leave School? (Artefact 5)

LEARNING SERVICES

All schools belong to a Learning Service.
These are located in regions throughout Tasmania.

LEARNING SERVICES (NORTH)

2 Invermay Road, Inveresk 7250
Phone: (03) 6336 2594 Fax: (03) 6334 3350
Email: Learning.Services.north@education.tas.gov.au

LEARNING SERVICES (NORTH-WEST)

60 Wilmot Street, Burnie 7320
Phone: (03) 6434 6389 Fax: (03) 6431 8085
Email: Learning.Services.NW@education.tas.gov.au

LEARNING SERVICES (SOUTH)

213 Cambridge Road, Warrane 7018
Phone: (03) 6212 3119 Fax: (03) 6212 3111
Email: Learning.Services.S@education.tas.gov.au

NEED MORE COPIES?

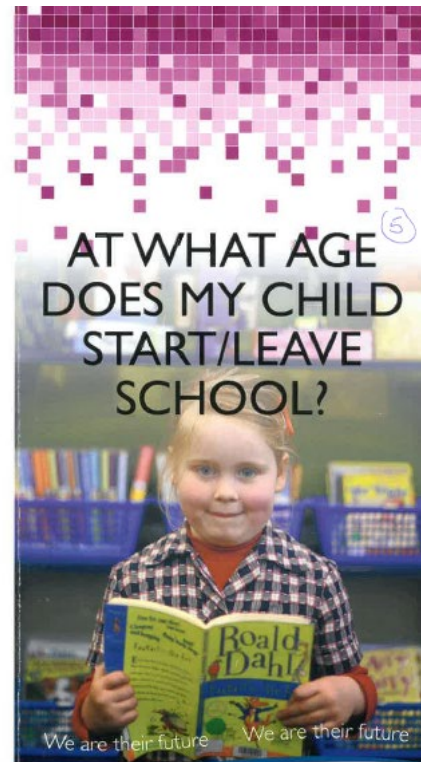
Please contact:

Marketing Services
Department of Education
GPO Box 169
HOBART TAS 7001

Email: marketing@education.tas.gov.au

Web: www.education.tas.gov.au

Published: October 2013



Department of Education



DID YOU KNOW?

- By law, your child is required to attend school full-time from the age of five.
- This means that a child who has turned five on or by 1 January in any year must start school in that year, or be provided with approved home education.
- Home education is when your child is taught by you in your own home, and the Tasmanian Home Education Advisory Council (THEAC) has allowed you to do so. THEAC can be contacted on (03) 6334 5381.
- If you feel that your child is not ready for school, you should discuss your options with the school principal at your local school.

BEFORE KINDERGARTEN

- Schools offer programs to support families and young children before Kinder.
- These include Birth-to-5 initiatives, *Launching into Learning*, and pre-Kindergarten sessions.

- Parents and children attend these sessions together.
- *Child and Family Centres* located around the state are also places where parents and children can go together to have fun and access education and health services.

KINDERGARTEN

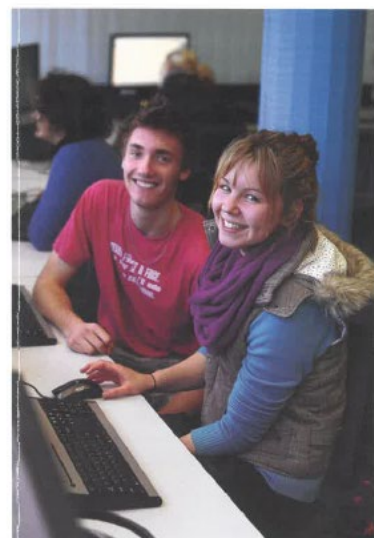
- Most children start school in Kindergarten in their local school when they are four years of age.
- A child who is four years old on 1 January in any year is entitled to go to Kindergarten.

SCHOOL LEAVING AGE

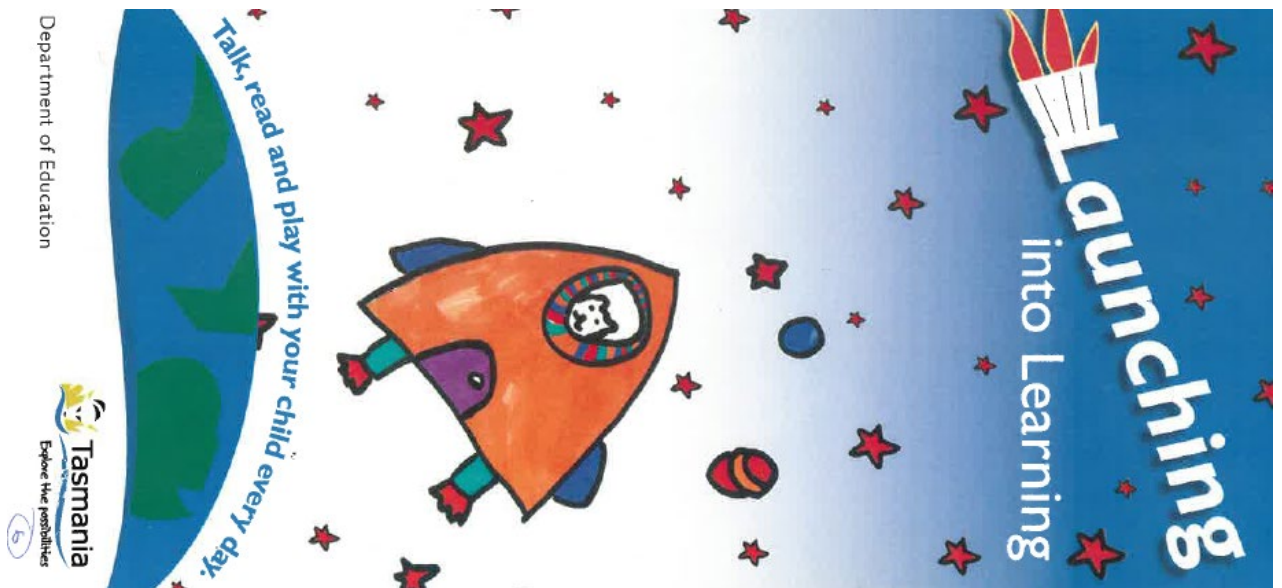
- Young people are required to continue participating in education or training until they turn 17 years of age.
- Participation options include:
 - » study at a senior secondary school or a combined (district high) school (Years 11 and 12)
 - » study at TasTAFE
 - » an apprenticeship or traineeship
 - » a training course through a registered training organisation
 - » being home-educated through registration with the Tasmanian Home Education Advisory Council.

WHERE CAN YOU GET MORE INFORMATION?

- Talk to your child's teacher or principal.
- Visit the Department of Education website: www.education.tas.gov.au



Appendix 14: Parent Information Brochure, Launching into Learning (Artefact 6)



Appendix 15: Parent Information Brochure, Kinder Ready (Artefact 7)



Kinder Ready

Helping your child get the best start in Kindergarten

Getting ready for Kindergarten starts at birth.

Kinder Ready is an interactive website with video clips and tips to show you things you can do to help your child get ready for Kindergarten.

Visit www.kinder-ready.education.tas.gov.au



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