The Sustainment of Early Childhood Teachers in the Classroom.

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Abstract.

The changing nature of teaching has led to an increased focus on the retention and productive engagement of teachers in the classrooms. The ongoing implementation of educational change, accompanied by an ageing trend amongst teachers and rising incidences of teacher attrition, stress and burnout, highlights the importance of teachers being sustained in their profession. Furthermore, recognition of the value of early childhood education has drawn attention to early childhood teachers' abilities to be sustained in their teaching practice, effectively engaging students in the learning process.

Acknowledging these issues, this study examined factors that influence early childhood classroom teachers' sustainment in the profession and in teaching. Conducted in the northern metropolitan teaching districts of Perth, Western Australia, this study utilized qualitative methodology in two phases of data collection: open-ended surveys and focus group discussions with 57 early childhood teachers, and case studies, compiled from in-depth interviews with six experienced early childhood teachers who had taught more than 20 years in the classroom. Data was analysed to identify key factors impacting on early childhood teachers staying committed and productively engaged in the profession and in the craft of teaching.

Findings indicated that the early childhood teachers in this study were sustained in the profession through maintaining personal well-being and a life-work balance. Factors sustaining participants' job satisfaction contributed to their ongoing commitment and engagement in the teaching process, particularly their enjoyment of daily interaction with students and the relationships developed with work colleagues. Positive attitudes towards learning, teaching and change were also found to impact on sustainment, as did participants' altruistic beliefs, caring dispositions, emotional intelligences and personal well-being. Other sustaining factors included the early childhood work environment and conditions of employment and access to a range of sources of support. Furthermore, the early childhood teachers in this study revealed that teacher wisdom, demonstrated through self-awareness, realistic expectations and the ability to rationalise teaching practices to accommodate a range of needs, underlined their maintaining personal well-being and a life-work balance to be sustained in the profession and teaching in the classroom.

Declaration

I certify that this thesis does not, to the best of my knowledge and belief:

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

In an ever-changing world, education systems are forced to respond to shifting economic, political, societal and technological trends. Within our society, educational reforms in policy, practice and resource allocation are commonplace, implemented in an effort to maintain continued provision of quality educational services. Ongoing change impacts on the duties of those who work within the education profession. In particular, teachers are challenged in their roles as educators, reassessing their beliefs and practices in order to cope with the demands placed upon them while continuing to work productively within their profession. This study is an attempt to disclose the realities of early childhood teachers who have persevered and remain teaching in the classroom.

Teachers play a crucial role in education, providing instruction and guidance to ensure student-learning takes place. Teachers also play a critical role in the successful implementation of educational change and reform; putting educational policies and strategies into practice (Hargreaves & Evans, 1997). In a climate of ongoing change, teachers must not only persevere in their profession, but also take on new challenges and initiatives to become lifelong learners. At the same time teachers are expected to demonstrate professional commitment, occupation motivation and effective engagement in the teaching process (Livneh & Livneh, 1999; Murdock, 2003; Yoo, 2002). These expectations rely on teachers developing knowledge and strategies that not only enable them to survive, but to thrive in their profession.

The field of early childhood education (ECE) is also experiencing intense reform, affecting the nature of teachers' work. The past decade has experienced a worldwide increase in the number of 3 and 4 year old children attending early childhood educational settings, requiring the services of skilled early childhood teachers. Not only does the influx of younger children into an education system mean an expansion in the provision of services and the need for a greater number of early childhood educators, but also leads to increased focus on the quality and maintenance of those teachers currently teaching in early childhood settings.

An atmosphere of continual change and reform contributes to undermining early childhood teachers' efficacy, professional commitment and teaching practice. Research into strategies that enable early childhood teachers to be sustained in their profession has the potential to identify knowledge that promotes effective teaching and student learning. In investigating the sustainment of early childhood teachers in the profession and in teaching, this study contributes to knowledge that may conceivably lead to the maintenance of quality education to students and the well-being of the teaching profession.

At this point it is important to note that the concept of "quality" in early childhood education is a contentious issue and has been the topic of much debate. Terms such as "effective," " productive" and "quality" teaching practice are open to subjective interpretation (Dahlberg, Moss, & Pence, 1999). In this study, these terms refer to early childhood teachers being able to demonstrate and apply professional knowledge, skills and attributes to their specific teaching contexts.

Teacher Sustainment

The focus of this study is teacher sustainment. As the term "sustainment" implies continuance, perseverance and fortitude (Thesaurus, 2005), this study considers teacher sustainment to be the propensity of teachers to remain effectively engaged in the teaching process and profession over an extended period of time.

Although teacher sustainment may be considered a broad concept, several traits have been identified in the literature as associated with teacher sustainment , including professional commitment, job satisfaction, occupational motivation and effective teaching practices (Lokan, 2003; Shann, 1998; Williams, 2003b; Woods & Weasmer, 2002). In addition, this study also considers that sustainment in teaching refers to the propensity of teachers to cope with the daily demands associated with teaching and the implementation of educational change.

Other studies have used the terms "teacher resiliency" (Howard & Johnson, 2004, p. 399) and "teacher persistence" (Stanford, 2001, p. 75), implying survival and endurance. However, as the emphasis in this study is on the maintenance and

continuance of effective engagement in teaching, teacher sustainment is the preferred term.

Background to the Study

There is a growing awareness that certain professions within western societies, including the teaching profession, are facing a series of crises (De Heus & Diekstra, 1999; Preston, 2001). Many professionals in these fields are leaving their chosen profession, resulting in a drain of knowledge and expertise from each particular field. Those who choose to stay are increasingly older and often disillusioned with having to cope with changing work demands. The teaching profession is also perceived to be increasingly less attractive to the younger population: offering few promotional opportunities, challenging work conditions and poor professional prestige (Darling-Hammond, 2003; Department of Education and Training, 2003a; Inman & Marlow, 2004; Institute for the Service Professions, 2005). Those entering the profession are also likely to possess unrealistic expectations, resulting in their early exit from the profession, further compounding the situation (Danielson, 2002).

In the United States of America an exodus and ageing of the teaching profession has been recorded. Up to half of newly graduating teachers are reported to be leaving the profession within the first 5 years of teaching. The average age of teachers staying in the United States workforce is in the mid-to late 40’s, with the majority having been in the profession for over 20 years (Danielson, 2002; National Centre for Policy Analysis, 2001). Those entering the teaching profession are also likely to be older, averaging 33 years of age, and to have come from other careers (Potier, 2001). In addition, it is predicted that American public school enrolments will continue to increase, resulting in a forecast shortage of teachers within the next 10 years (National Centre for Policy Analysis, 2001). Similar demographic patterns are evident in America’s early childhood education system, raising concerns that a foreseeable lowering of academic entrance requirements for teacher-training courses may undermine the quality of the teachers working within the profession. This, in turn, will influence the ability of the American education system to maintain educational standards (Hyson, 2001).

In Australia, similar trends are occurring. Most teachers, including early childhood educators, are now in their mid 40's, with over 44% being older than 45 years of age and having taught on average 20 to 24 years (Committee for the Review of Teaching and Teacher Education, 2003a; Department of Education and Training, 2002a, 2002b). In Western Australia up to 27% of male teachers and 23% of female teachers between 20 and 30 years of age have left teaching in the past 10 years, and those entering the profession are likely to be embarking on their second career (Department of Education and Training, 2002a). Although conflicting evidence exists regarding future shortages in teacher supply (Committee for the Review of Teaching and Teacher Education, 2003a; Preston, 2001), studies conducted in New South Wales and Victoria predict a future shortage of suitably qualified early childhood teachers (Kirby, 2002; MCEETYA, 2001; Warrilow & Fisher, 2003). This shortfall is a concern as young children throughout Australia are increasingly participating in early childhood education, requiring the services of skilled early childhood trained teachers. Such trends lead to an increased awareness of the need to nurture teachers remaining within the profession, to maintain the quality of early childhood education.

Furthermore, with Australia's education system being increasingly linked to international status and economic growth, the adoption of a business orientation towards education has led to an increased emphasis on management, performance and accountability (Angus, 1992; Gibbs, 1999). Changing societal expectations have also impacted on the teaching profession (Angus, 1992; Gibbs, 1999; Hargreaves, 1994; Hargreaves & Evans, 1997; Hargreaves, Lieberman, Fullan, & Hopkins, 1998). Focus on issues such as national standards of numeracy and literacy, boys' education, aboriginal education, inclusion of students with disabilities, the health and wellbeing of young children and increased access to early childhood education (Commonwealth Taskforce on Child Development Health and Wellbeing, 2005) have altered the nature of teachers' work.

Similarly, trends within the teaching profession, such as the feminisation of teaching, limited promotional opportunities, and increased teacher accountability (Australian Education Union (AEU), 2003) have resulted in changing work expectations and conditions. Added to this, teachers have experienced significant

educational reforms that directly impact on their pedagogical knowledge and practice. In Western Australia, for example, educational reforms include the implementation and ongoing adaptation of a curriculum improvement program known as First Steps (1991 and 2004), the Curriculum Framework (1997), and the Outcomes and Standards Framework (1998). Furthermore, the "Plan for Government Schools 2004 to 2007" (Department of Education and Training, 2003b) outlines additional changes relating to student learning and assessment, use of information and technology (ICT), teacher professional development, student inclusion and parent and community involvement. Such reforms reconceptualise the nature of teachers' work.

Educational reform and changing societal expectations have been linked to increasing incidences of teacher stress and burnout (Hargreaves, 1999; Smylie, 1999). The introduction of competency frameworks and research focusing on effective teaching also gives cause for teachers to question their own competencies and ability to cope with change (Hare, 1993; Maloney & Barblett, 2002; Ryan & Cooper, 2000). Emphasis on such issues impacts on teachers' morale and pedagogical practices, challenging their self-efficacy (Nias, 1999) and undermining the well-being of the teaching profession.

Significance of the Study

In the current educational climate where reported incidences of job dissatisfaction, stress, burnout, and exodus from the profession are high, it is significant that this study attempts to identify positive aspects of the teaching profession, highlighting factors that may contribute to early childhood teaching being a fulfilling and rewarding profession. Furthermore, this study attempts to contribute to research involving early childhood teachers and their teaching practice.

Although many factors impact on the sustainment of early childhood teachers in the classroom, the majority of early childhood teachers continue to teach and gain personal satisfaction from teaching. Amongst these teachers there exists a select group that not only survive, but thrive: proactively responding to educational change, maintaining enthusiasm and professional commitment, while implementing quality learning programs for 3 to 8 year old students. In identifying factors that

sustain these teachers, others within the teaching profession may also be inspired in their teaching practice, reaffirm their commitment to early childhood education and ultimately elevate the status of teaching.

While several studies have investigated the careers of individual teachers, and their contributions to education, these studies have sought to define how teachers practice their craft, rather than what sustains teachers in their profession. Most studies have involved teachers working at a secondary level (Eick, 2002; Louden, 1991; Milner, 2002), or those who have pursued primary level or non-teaching, promotional and tertiary-level career paths (Brunetti, 2001; Kashatus, 2003; Robison, 2001). Of the few studies involving early childhood teachers (McClean, 1991; Yonemura, 1986), the focus has been on children's learning, teachers' reflections and teacher-child interactions, rather than early childhood teachers' sustainment in their profession.

In 2000 Fleer investigated the nature of research into early childhood education. Fleer (2000) revealed that until recently, research has been limited, primarily focussed on substantiating the relevance of early childhood education and its' long-term impact on children's learning. Fleer (2000) revealed that only 27 out of 277 studies carried out in Australia, from 1993 to 2000, investigated pedagogical issues or teachers' work. Furthermore, Fleer's (2000) survey of 345 early childhood teachers in Australia found that these teachers sought research-based information to direct their teaching practice. Fleer (2000) recommended that further research into all areas of early childhood education is necessary to develop evidence-based teaching practice and maintain quality delivery of service.

This study affirms the status of early childhood education and promotes teaching as a worthwhile profession to those currently within the teaching profession, as well as to prospective candidates. Through informing pre-service and novice teachers of factors that contribute to teacher sustainment, there is an increased likelihood of them developing realistic expectations and remaining in the teaching profession. This same knowledge may also lead to practising teachers reviving their commitment and proactive engagement in the profession. Finally, in gaining insights into experienced early childhood teachers' sustainment, this study

strives to describe traits that contribute to high-quality teachers developing high quality learning outcomes for their students.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to identify and describe factors sustaining early childhood teachers' motivation, commitment and passion for teaching, as well as their effective engagement in classroom teaching. In addition, this investigation seeks to promote a healthy early childhood teaching profession. Teachers of 3 to 8 year old children have been chosen for this study as they have undergone numerous educational changes that have had the potential to impact on their attitudes to teaching and their sustainment. In addition, little research involving early childhood teachers exists in this area.

A thorough search of the literature reveals there has been relevant research into newly graduating teachers' expectations and adaptations to the teaching profession (Ewing, 2001; Hyson, 2001; Inman & Marlow, 2004), but few have focussed on the other end of the spectrum, those who have taught more that 20 years and are still actively engaged in the teaching process (Lokan, 2003; Robison, 2001; Williams, 2003a). Research has also focussed on the stresses and demands of teaching, factors leading to teacher dissatisfaction, burnout and attrition, rather than on those who have chosen to stay (Vandenberghe & Huberman, 1999). Numerous studies have examined traits of effective teachers (Marland, 1994; Wallis, Nardi, von Minden, & Hoffman, 2002), but not what has sustained them in their chosen career.

This study examines what sustains early childhood teachers in their profession. Using open-ended question surveys and focus groups, this study investigates traits identified in the literature as being associated to teacher sustainment, including professional commitment, job satisfaction, occupational motivation, effective teaching practice and coping with daily demands of teaching and educational change (see Appendix E). Furthermore, this study examines six case studies of early childhood teachers who have taught more than 20 years and are regarded as quality teachers by others within their profession. Utilizing in-depth interviews conducted over a 7 month period, this study discloses what experiences,

beliefs and practices have contributed to these early childhood teachers being sustained in their profession, coping with daily demands of teaching and educational change.

Research Questions

This study sought to answer the following questions:

1. What factors contribute to early childhood teachers being sustained in their profession?
    - What sustains early childhood teachers' job satisfaction, occupational motivation and commitment to teaching?
    - What critical experiences impact on early childhood teachers' sustainment in their profession?

2. What factors contribute to early childhood teachers sustaining effective engagement in their daily teaching practice?
    - What strategies enable early childhood teachers to cope with the demands associated with teaching?
    - What strategies enable early childhood teachers to cope with issues related to the implementation of educational change?

Definitions of Terms

The following definitions clarify terms frequently used in this study:

Early childhood education in Western Australia- refers to children aged from 3 to 8 years of age attending formal educational settings (Kindergarten, pre-school and Years 1, 2 and 3).

Educational change – refers to the changing roles of teachers and changes to policy and practice imposed from sources outside the immediate classroom, such as those being made to curriculum.

Experienced early childhood teachers – refers to teachers who have taught more than twenty years and are currently teaching children 3 to 8 years of age in a school setting.

Job satisfaction – refers to the pleasure and enjoyment a teacher receives from teaching.

Life experiences – refers to events, intimate, social and traditional, that have influenced one's beliefs, knowledge and practices.

Occupational Motivation – refers to the ability to stay in teaching and be inspired to foster, promote and attain educational goals and philosopies during one's teaching career.

Professional Commitment – refers to why a teacher chooses to be a teacher and remain engaged in the teaching process.

Self-Efficacy – refers to ***perceived self-efficacy*** (Bandura, 1997, p. 3), "beliefs in one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments."

Sustainment- refers to the ability to remain effectively engaged in the teaching process and the profession over an extended period of time.

Teacher Knowledge – refers to ***personal practical knowledge*** (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995, p. 7), known as "that body of convictions and meanings, conscious or unconscious, that have arisen from experience (intimate, social and traditional) and that are expressed in a person's practices."

Well-being- refers to physical, emotional and mental health that contributes to maintaining effective performance.

Summary

This chapter has highlighted the background and significance of the study, revealing that the teaching profession is ageing, experiencing increasing incidences of stress and attrition while undergoing continual change and reform. Also identified is the lack of research into teacher sustainment and early childhood teachers' work, topics directly impacting on the continued provision of quality education to students.

To ensure clarity of understanding the term "sustainment in teaching" has been described. Furthermore, the purpose of the study and research questions are outlined, with the intent of identifying what factors contribute to early childhood teachers remaining effectively engaged in the teaching process and profession over an extended period of time. Finally, definitions of key terms used throughout the study have been provided.

The next chapter outlines the reviewed literature, covering research and written documents related to early childhood education, early childhood teachers' pedagogy and significant impacts on teachers' work and sustainment.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

In recent years attention has been drawn to the provision of quality education in Australian schools and the changing characteristics of Australian teachers. An important trend is the increasing age of teachers, linked to a prospective teacher shortage. Accompanying these issues is the call for increased accountability in relation to quality teachers and quality teaching. A growing interest is emerging into why, and how, experienced teachers are able to sustain their commitment to teaching and provide effective delivery of service. In this study, teachers currently teaching students from 3 to 8 years of age in a school setting are the focus of attention.

This chapter provides an insight into the status of early childhood education, including an overview of the nature of early childhood teachers' pedagogy, changing educational philosophies and the changing realities of early childhood teachers' work. This review highlights both international and Australian research which has investigated issues impacting on early childhood teachers' work. Relevant topics include educational change, teacher attrition, stress and burnout, teacher well-being, teacher job satisfaction and occupational motivation, as well as teacher commitment and engagement, teacher knowledge and learning and teacher career development. Literature related to this study's methodological practice and theoretical and conceptual understandings is included within the relevant chapters.

Status of Early Childhood Education

Early childhood education is experiencing increasing focus and transformation worldwide. Not only have changing economic and social patterns resulted in children entering early childhood school settings at an earlier age, but research has highlighted that learning in the early years of life significantly impacts on later development and participation in society (Mustard & McCain, 1999).

Internationally, more and more children are attending informal and formal early childhood settings at an earlier age. In Europe up to 50% of all 4 year olds attend educational centres with a trained teacher, and in countries such as Belgium, France and Italy, over 90% of 3 year olds have access to some form of pre-primary education (Fleer, 2000). Australia has also experienced a rapid growth in children accessing early-childhood services, with 83.4% of 4 years olds and 11.2% of 3 year

olds participating in educational programs in 2004-5 (Steering Committee for the Review of Commonwealth/State Service Provision, 2006).

Tasks previously considered the sole responsibility of parents and families are now shared within the wider community. Early childhood settings, including creches, day care and family day care centres, kindergartens and preschools are increasingly responsible for the nurturing, development and education of children from 0 to 5 years of age (Commonwealth Taskforce on Child Development Health and Wellbeing, 2005). This rapid expansion of early childhood services has caused governments to review policies, teacher training and funding of early childhood services to promote quality educational practices and environments (Drury, Miller, & Campbell, 2000; Lambert & Clyde, 2000; Miller, 2002).

International research has recognized that the early years of a child's life significantly impact on their development and future academic capabilities (Fleer, 2000). Research in the field of neuroscience has disclosed that brain development is faster and more extensive in the early years of life than previously thought. In the first 3 years of life the brain's neural connections become "hard-wired" (Fleer, 2000, p. 12). While brain development, the production and elimination of brain synapses, continues throughout life, the brain's production of these learning pathways is greater in the first decade of life. During this time high levels of stimulation, in rich and dynamic learning environments are thought to enhance brain development (Mustard & McCain, 1999; Shore, 1997).

Furthermore, longitudinal studies, such as The High/Scope Perry Preschool Study (Schweinhart, Barnes, & Weikart, 2002), a longitudinal investigation of the lives of 123 lower socio-economic African-Americans, have identified that participation in high quality preschool education programs significantly contributes to a reduction in crime rates and improvement in educational and economic status, potential earnings and commitment to marriage in later life.

Increased participation in early childhood education and attention to research has lead to a range of programs and research projects being initiated. In the United States, the Head Start Program was introduced in the 1960's and 1970's, in response

to the government's "Great Society War on Poverty" (Lambert & Clyde, 2000, p. 3). Head Start aimed to compensate and educate disadvantaged 3 and 4 year-old children, using a range of programs based on various philosophical understandings. It was not until 1987 that early childhood education in the United States adopted a unified approach, with the concept of Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP) being developed by The American National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). Based on Piagetian theories, DAP programs promoted child-learning through success-orientated tasks that matched children's level of development (Lambert & Clyde, 2000).

In Great Britain, the government recognized the significance of children's early years of development and of the need for quality carers in a 1990 report titled "Starting with Quality" (Miller, 2002, p. 17). Several reports and studies followed, including The Effective Early Learning Project from 1993 to 1997 (Pascal & Bertram, 1997), which concentrated on developing carers' planning and reflection practices to raise the quality of early learning in young children. The 1998 Sure Start Project (Drury et al., 2000) promoted the health and development of young children through local authorities working with communities to meet the needs of young children and their families. An ongoing longitudinal study involving over 3000 children, The Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE) Project commenced in 1997 with the purpose of improving the quality of early childhood care, education and delivery of services (Sylva, Melhuish, Sammon, Siraj - Blatchford, & Taggart, 2003).

Similarly, Australia has also experienced a growing interest in early childhood education, giving rise to a number of government-sponsored reports, beginning with "A Snapshot into the Early Years of Schooling" (Laver & National Board of Employment Education and Training, 1992). In 1999, an Australian background report was prepared for the Commonwealth Government, as part of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)'s thematic review of early childhood education and care (Press & Hayes, 1999). This report identified the need to develop a "national vision for children" (Press & Hayes, 1999, p. 62) and expand provision of quality early childhood education and care to meet the needs of all Australian children.

Further reports followed, including “Just the Beginning” (Raban, 2000), “Voices from the Field” (Fleer, 2000), “Education of Teachers of Indigenous Students in Early Childhood Services and Schools” (MCEETYA Taskforce on Indigenous Education, 2001), and the “Review of Preschool Services in Victoria” (Kirby, 2002). These reports all acknowledge the vital role early childhood education plays in Australian children’s learning and development.

Consequently, ongoing efforts are being made to improve access and availability of early childhood educational services throughout Australia, with state governments offering formal 5 year-old pre-school education, and increasingly 4 year-old kindergarten education (Western Australian Department of Education, 2002). In addition, “A National Agenda for Early Childhood” is being developed by the Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services (Commonwealth Taskforce on Child Development Health and Wellbeing, 2005). Currently in draft form, the National Agenda aims to promote healthy families, extend provision for early learning and care, support parenting and create child-friendly communities. Underlying principles include collaboration between services, a strengths-based and outcomes approach to child well-being and the use of Australian-relevant research to support policy and decision making. Several initiatives and programs have been developed to meet these objectives, under the umbrella of the “Stronger Families and Communities Strategy (SFCS) 2004-2009” (Department of Families, 2004).

Increased attempts are also being made to encourage Australian-based research for the development of early childhood education curricula and policies based on local needs and practices. Raban (2000), Fleer (2000) and the Commonwealth Taskforce on Child Development, Health and Well-being (2005) all cite the need for policies to be based on evidence-based practices and for the development of an overseeing body to ensure that research is valid and effectively applied to policy development. Clearly, Australian-based research is essential for early childhood education to be relevant and receptive to the needs of Australian children, parents and the community.

Nature of Early Childhood Teachers' Pedagogy

Early childhood teachers' pedagogy and practice has also experienced ongoing change and reform. Although still perceived as largely concerned with providing a nurturing and caring environment, greater attention is being given to the impact of early childhood education on brain development, long-term learning, social skills and continuity (Mustard & McCain, 1999; Smidt, 1998). With governments making increasing provision for younger children in formal education settings, organizational changes have been made to early childhood teachers' workloads and job descriptions (Drury et al., 2000; Hyson, 2001; Maloney & Barblett, 2000). At the same time, early childhood teachers have been forced to rethink their goals, beliefs and practices to meet changing societal and parental expectations.

Accompanying changes to early childhood teachers' pedagogy is the plethora of philosophical approaches being popularised, as described in the following section. Each approach is intent on developing students' true potential. Early childhood teachers' work has not only changed, it has been reconceptualised.

Changing Educational Philosophies

Divergent educational theories have accounted for the development of a range of educational programs and practices considered suitable for teaching young children. Shifting consensus in what constitutes best teaching practice requires early childhood teachers not only to change their beliefs, but also alter the nature and purpose of their work.

The work of Piaget (1896-1980), outlining defined stages of cognitive development, became internationally accepted in the 1980's and 1990's. Piaget's theories described how learning is constructed, and at what age specific practices and activities were appropriate for children in which to engage (Lambert & Clyde, 2000; Piaget, 1955). Developmentally appropriate programs (DAP) were subsequently implemented in early childhood centres throughout the world during the 1980's and 1990's. In more recent times DAP has been critiqued for its lack of attention to the influence of culture on young children's development (Fleer, 1995).

Vygotsky's concept of The Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) has also impacted on the field of early childhood education. Vygotsky (1896-1934) advocated that children learn best in a social, interactive context, where language is perceived as the key to both formal and informal instruction (Berk & Winsler, 1995; Rieber & Robinson, 2004). Vygotsky's work has underlined the value of cooperative learning, play and socialising in early childhood settings and the teachers' role in extending children's learning.

In the 1990's pedagogical practices first applied by Malaguzzi (1920-1994) in Reggio Emilia, Italy, became internationally recognized by educationalists as exemplars of best practice (Edwards, Gandini, & Forman, 1998; Fleet & Patterson, 2003; MacNaughton & Williams, 2004). Based on principles that children, parents and teachers are co-constructors of knowledge and reflective learners, children are viewed as competent social learners and active participants in their learning (Malaguzzi, 1993, 1994). Increasingly, Malaguzzi's approaches to early childhood education are gaining greater acceptance and learning centres adhering to these beliefs being established world-wide (Edwards et al., 1998; Fleet & Patterson, 2003).

Other theories also hold relevance for early childhood settings. Based on constructivist beliefs, Bruner and Wood first applied the term "scaffolding" to learning in 1976 (Wood, Bruner, & Ross, 1976). Encouraging early childhood teachers to develop programs that were stimulating, structured and controlled, Bruner and Wood considered that children achieve success through engaging in tasks within their level of competency. Bruner also explored how culture influences children's development (Bruner, 1991, 1996) and should be considered as part of the education process. Constructivist principles have also led early childhood educators Katz and Chard to develop and implement the Project Approach in the United Kingdom and the United States, based on in-depth exploration of concrete-based, child-initiated topics and scaffolding of questions to extend children's development (Helm & Katz, 2001; Katz & Chard, 1989). Subsequently, various models of the Project approach have also gained international recognition as exemplars of best practice in early childhood education (Kostelnik, Soderman, & Whiren, 2004).

More recently, Gardner's work on multiple intelligences has come to prominence. Gardner advocates teachers should recognize that young children progress along a continuum with a mixed spectrum of abilities and require divergent learning opportunities that focus on their strengths (Gardner, 1993, 1999).

Early childhood teachers have been exposed to a wide range of philosophical frameworks that have the potential to impact on their thinking and teaching practice. Each philosophical stance requires early childhood teachers to reassess their own pedagogical knowledge to determine what is best for their situation and for their students. At the same time early childhood teachers are expected to follow directives from their employers as to appropriate philosophies and practices for early childhood settings (State Executive Education Department of Western Australia, 1999). Adequate resourcing, professional development, time and collegial and administrative support also impinge on the adoption and effective implementation of educational philosophies into early childhood settings. These factors not only impact on early childhood teachers' pedagogy and practice, but may also influence their self-efficacy and ability to be sustained in the profession and in daily teaching.

Changing Realities of Early Childhood Teachers' Work

The role of the early childhood teacher as a carer, instructor, facilitator and co-learner is undergoing an evolutionary process. Early childhood teachers are expected to keep pace with new developments and act on what they believe will benefit their students and lead to quality education in the classroom (Australian Education Union, 2003; Fleet & Patterson, 2003; Riner, 2000).

Case studies conducted on early childhood teachers have attempted to elaborate on the complex nature of early childhood teaching, examining teachers' beliefs about teaching and how their knowledge is applied to curriculum development, management of the environment and time, use of play, power and questioning, and their interactions with children (Fleet & Clyde, 1993; McClean, 1991; Wilcox-Herzog, 2002; Yonemura, 1986). For example, Wilcox-Herzog (2002) surveyed 47 American early childhood educators to reveal that those teachers trained with a strong theoretical framework felt empowered to put their beliefs into practice. While such studies portray the realities of early childhood teaching, they

fail to clearly indicate how early childhood teachers are to remain engaged and sustained in their teaching beliefs and practices.

Early childhood teachers' job satisfaction and motivation have also been examined (Boyer, 1999), identifying that early childhood teachers need to develop positive self-images, make contact with good influences and withdraw from negative interactions, while maintaining a sense of proportion in their lives through involvement in outside interests and physical activity. Boyer's (1999) article advises early childhood teachers to read widely and prioritise their needs, then allow for periods of quiet reflection. Such recommendations require early childhood teachers to re-evaluate their priorities and potentially change their thinking and approach to balancing life-work commitments.

Historically in Western Australia, early childhood teachers of children aged 3 to 5 years of age have worked in relative independence in their educational settings, often situated some distance from affiliated primary schools (Kronemann, 2001). Until the 1970's preschool education was the domain of voluntary agencies, run by parent committees, local government or religious groups. In ensuing years the Western Australian Government has assumed greater administrative, curricula and financial control over pre-school education (Press & Hayes, 1999). In 1993 the government phased in optional fulltime educational programs for 5 year olds, while continuing to share responsibility with the Department of Community Development and voluntary agencies for 4 year old education. In 1995, under the Good Start Program, both 4 and 5 year old preschool education were transferred to the public education system (Kronemann, 2001). These changes have resulted in new administrative procedures and changing accountability processes, including the implementation of outcome-based learning, reporting procedures and performance management.

In Western Australia, the increased provision of placements for 4 and 5 year-old students in formal education settings, coupled with adherence to both the Curriculum Framework (Curriculum Council, 1998) and Outcomes and Standards Framework (Education Department of Western Australia, 1998), has impacted on the way early childhood teachers work. In a discussion paper entitled "Early

Childhood Education: It's more important than you think" (State Executive Education Department of Western Australia, 1999), the Government acknowledged the value of early childhood education and the need to develop new practices linked to the Curriculum Framework, yet did not disclose how these practices should be implemented or sustained.

Consequently, early childhood teachers are challenged to develop and implement appropriate programs for both kindergarten and pre-primary age children, while meeting expectations of increased accountability (Department of Education and Training, 2003b). Early childhood teachers are also required to modify teaching practices to meet the diverse range of student needs, particularly in instances where split year-level classes occur.

Furthermore, as a consequence of the Western Australian Government formally recognizing the right of every child to access preschool education, regardless of ability (Kronemann, 2001), work-related responsibilities have undergone further changes. Since 1993 screening and early intervention programs have been implemented in early childhood settings. Inclusion of students with special needs into early childhood settings has also become more commonplace (Angus et al., 2004; Department of Education and Training, 2003b). These practices have impacted on early childhood teachers' planning, teaching and expectations (Angus et al., 2004; Blackmore & Seah, 1996; Kilgallon & Maloney, 2003). For example, inclusive practice has led teachers to redefine their workload, devoting additional time to accessing applicable professional development, negotiating with out-of-school services, and training and collaborating with special education assistants (Angus et al., 2004).

In a climate of ongoing change, the reviewed literature also reveals that adequate resourcing and ongoing professional development are necessary for teachers to cope with changing work expectations (Angus et al., 2004; Australian Education Union, 2003; Hargreaves, Earl, Moore, & Manning, 2001; Kirby, 2002). The availability and opportunity to access such resources varies according to the circumstances in which teachers operate. Effective use of such resources relies on initiative and teachers renegotiating their time and commitments, often impinging on

their private lives as well as teaching practice. Accessing resources and professional development in itself acts as yet another change to the nature of early childhood teachers' work.

Changing educational trends challenge the established beliefs and practices of experienced early childhood teachers, forcing teachers to be proactive and reflective in their practice: processes teachers often find difficult to develop (Atkinson & Claxton, 2000). Early childhood teachers are required to be knowledgeable, skilled, observant, a model of behaviour, flexible and caring, yet remain committed and motivated (Katz, 1998), engaging students in meaningful learning experiences (Fleet & Patterson, 2003). These expectations require early childhood teachers to be sustained in their profession.

Other Impacts on Teachers' Work

Teaching is a dynamic and complex task. Teachers have the responsibility for educating students to ensure societal continuity and economic stability. In addition, early childhood teachers are charged with the responsibility of inducting children into the education system, while providing dynamic learning opportunities to optimise students' growth and development. Teachers are also expected to be proactive, efficient, effective, resourceful, motivated and engaged in their teaching role (Riner, 2000). These expectations place great demands on teachers' abilities to be sustained in their profession.

In this section relevant literature and research on a range of topics impacting on teachers' work are discussed, including the educational change process, and teacher attrition, stress and burnout. Also highlighted is research into teacher well-being, job satisfaction and occupational motivation, and professional commitment and engagement, as well as teacher knowledge and learning and teacher career development. While most of the research is generic, such studies may be applicable to early childhood teachers, as teachers share many similar work expectations, conditions and stresses in their daily practice of teaching. The reviewed literature also contributes to a deeper awareness of the complexities of teaching, including early childhood teaching.

Educational Change

Much has been written about the concept of educational change: definitions, characteristics, successful and unsuccessful examples of implementation (Fullan & Stiegelbauer, 1991; Hargreaves, 1994, 1997; Hargreaves et al., 2001; Hargreaves & Fullan, 1992; Hargreaves et al., 1998). The reviewed literature reveals that educational change is ongoing, directly impacting on teachers' responsibilities, commitments and ability to maintain competent delivery of education to students. The implementation of educational change into the workplace is also perceived to contribute to job dissatisfaction, stress, burnout and attrition in all levels of teaching.

Some proponents of education consider governments use education as an economic, social, and political tool to serve their own purposes, resulting in Australian education systems constantly being restructured and developing a corporate focus (Angus, 1998; Gibbs, 1999). The adoption of such a focus has led to the implementation of policies and reform that are productivity driven, resulting in a continual state of change within the administration of education departments and the expectations of their teaching staff.

Government calls for increased accountability, national curricula and national literacy and numeracy standards have led to reforms within the education system. In 1998 the Federal Government commissioned an inquiry, "A Class Act: Inquiry into the Status of the Teaching Profession" (Senate Employment, 1998), which reported on an increased emphasis in literacy and testing, and increased curriculum requirements from the community, distracting teachers from their main role of teaching. Recommendations were made to establish a national body for professional teaching standards and registration, which to date, has occurred on a state-by-state basis.

Another report, "Australia's Teachers: Australia's Future. Advancing Innovation, Science, Technology and Mathematics" (Committee for the Review of Teaching and Teacher Education, 2003a) called for changes to teacher training, professional development, accreditation and career paths. In addition, an agenda for action was compiled (Committee for the Review of Teaching and Teacher Education, 2003b), outlining avenues for further research, including a review of

current pre-service teacher training and teacher salary-structure and incentives and the development of a national framework for teaching.

Consequently, other government-funded reports have been produced, including “Prepared to Teach: an investigation into the preparation of teachers to teach literacy and numeracy” (Louden, Rohl, Gore et al., 2005) and “In Teachers’ Hands: Effective Teaching Practices in the Early Years of Schooling” (Louden, Rohl, Barratt-Pugh et al., 2005). Such reports contribute to teachers’ work being redefined, recommending changes be made to pre-service training, induction and work-expectations and practices. This state of continual review and reform has the potential to result in increased accountability and stress being placed on teachers, both from within and outside the profession.

Although change is ongoing, governments and educational researchers still acknowledge teachers are the principle keys to student learning and educational change: the success or failure of educational reform is dependent on teachers’ abilities to understand and implement the reforms (Hargreaves & Evans, 1997; Senate Employment, 1998). For teachers to continue to implement educational change they need to be motivated and sustained in their teaching. Collaboration amongst teachers has been seen as a key component of the educational change process (Hargreaves, 1994), yet it is also acknowledged that enforcing change and collaboration on teachers results in a “balkanised culture” (Hargreaves & Fullan, 1992, p. 229), in which teachers end up working in small groups, fragmenting educational change. As Hargreaves states,

> Attempts at teacher development and educational changes will meet with little success unless they engage with the purposes of the teacher, unless they acknowledge the person that the teacher is, and unless they adjust to the slow pace of human growth that takes place in the individual and collective lives of teachers. (Hargreaves & Fullan, 1992, p. 236).

Furthermore, Hargreaves, Earl, Moore and Manning (2001) acknowledge that effective implementation of education change involves not only a shift in teachers’ knowledge and practice, but a change in belief. For teachers to be effective implementers of change they need to develop an understanding and commitment to proposed changes, and become emotionally engaged in the change process (Hargreaves, et.al., 2001).

Hargreaves and Evans (1997) reported on past educational reforms through the 1980's and 1990's in the United Kingdom. Changes in family structure, children's behaviour and advances in technology were seen to impinge on teachers' abilities to cope with change. Similar findings also arose in an Australian-based survey-study of 2500 primary school principals (Angus & Olney, 2001), in which school principals indicated that schools were harder places to work in, with educational change contributing to teachers being pessimistic about the future. To cope with these trends Angus and Olney (2001) recommended that emphasis be placed on professional development and increasing teachers' occupational motivation.

In Western Australia, educational change is ongoing. Recent years have seen the implementation of the Curriculum Framework (Curriculum Council, 1998) and the Standards and Outcomes Framework (Education Department of Western Australia, 1998). A move towards standardised assessment and accountability for both students and teachers, including the Western Australian Literacy and Numeracy Assessment (WALNA) for students in years three, five and seven and the Policy Framework for Performance Management (2002) for teachers has also occurred. The "Plan for Government Schools, 2004-2007" (Department of Education and Training, 2003b) outlines changes currently taking place, including increased standardised assessment and reporting for students in literacy and numeracy, re-introduction of First Steps Literacy and Mathematics, increased integration of Information and Communications Technology (ICT) in education, implementation of the Competency Framework for Teachers, increased inclusion of all students in mainstream education, and introduction of the Family Links program to promote parental involvement in students' schooling. These changes directly impact on the nature of teachers' work and the ability of teachers to be sustained within their profession.

Clearly, the effective implementation of educational reforms and initiatives is an ongoing issue. Failure to keep pace with changes in educational policy and practices potentially undermines the quality of student education and contributes to demoralizing all levels of the teaching profession and increasing incidences of

teacher attrition, stress and burnout (Nias, 1999; Smylie, 1999). As teachers are a critical element in the success of educational change, research into teachers' sustainment and engagement in their profession is of prime importance. While the reviewed literature has tended to consider the teaching profession as a homogenous identity, this study provides unique information, highlighting how a specific group of educators, early childhood teachers, cope with the demands of educational change.

Teacher Attrition, Stress and Burnout

The terms stress and burnout are often bandied about in our society, indicative of a growing prevalence in the inability of people to cope with the daily demands placed upon them. Indicators of stress and burnout, including chronic fatigue, cynicism and feelings of helplessness, ill-health, sleeplessness, depression, and increased job absenteeism are evident in the teaching profession (Maslach, 1999). Low levels of teacher efficacy are also thought to be an indicator of teacher stress and burnout (Labone, 2002). Such factors contribute to undermining the quality of teaching and an exodus of teachers from the profession.

Many industrialised countries, including Australia, the United States of America, the United Kingdom and the European Economic Community report increased incidences of teachers leaving the profession before they reach retirement age (Darling-Hammond, 2003; Johnson, Berg, & Donaldson, 2005; Vandenberghe & Huberman, 1999). In the United States the majority of teachers who leave the profession are those who have taught less then 5 years. Novice teachers cite unrealistic expectations and lack of support, leading to stress and a sense of isolation, as prime reasons for leaving the profession. Other reasons given include poor income and work conditions, lack of potential advancement and student behaviour (Danielson, 2002; Darling-Hammond, 2003; Ewing, 2001; Inman & Marlow, 2004; National Centre for Policy Analysis, 2001). Similar findings are evident in other countries, including Australia (Preston, 2001; Wilhelm, Dewhurst-Savellis, & Parker, 2000), the United Kingdom (Gold & Roth, 1993) and New Zealand (Whitehead, Ryba, & O'Driscoll, 2000).

Those teachers who choose to stay in teaching often face hardship and demoralizing experiences. The reviewed literature suggests teachers are experiencing high levels of stress, finding it difficult to stay motivated and engaged in the act of teaching or in adapting to educational change (Gold & Roth, 1993; Vandenberghe & Huberman, 1999; Whitehead et al., 2000; Wiley, 2000). Teacher stress and burnout has been linked to job dissatisfaction, depersonalisation and diminished personal accomplishment. Research has also indicated that teacher stress and burnout increases with age and workload (Vandenberghe & Huberman, 1999; Whitehead et al., 2000). For example, a survey of 386 New Zealand primary teachers revealed that emotional exhaustion was prevalent and was attributed to educational change and increased workloads (Whitehead et al., 2000).

In the United Kingdom, incidences of primary teachers ignoring administrative demands, or resorting to coping strategies related to survival, rather than to effective teaching practice have been reported (Woods, 1999). A stress inventory survey conducted on 169 Scottish and 163 Australian teachers across all levels of the profession (Pithers & Soden, 1998) also identified that lack of social support and personal self-care structures, particularly for female teachers, impacted on levels of teacher strain.

Research in Holland (Brenninkmeijer, VanYperen, & Buunk, 2001), involving a survey of 120 secondary teachers revealed that burnout is linked to a lack of “perceived superiority (feeling better than others)” (Brenninkmeijer, Van Yperen & Buunk, 2001, p. 50). The study indicated that lack of perceived superiority has the potential to be detrimental to student well-being and performance. In Finland, a questionnaire survey of 1059 teachers working within the Helsinki education system also identified strong links between job demands, such as student behaviour, workload and work environment, and teacher burnout. Job resources, including job control, administrative support, information and social climate were also seen to influence teacher commitment and engagement (Hakanen, Bakker, & Schaufeli, 2006).

Internationally, several preventative measures used to reduce teacher burnout and improve teacher retention and performance have been trialled (Cheek, Bradley,

Parr, & Lan, 2003; Darling-Hammond, 2003; Friedman, 2000). In Israel, Friedman (2000) outlined a three level approach, involving a series of workshops focussed on improving teachers' technical skills and stress management, as well as a review of organizational goals, communications, support and professional development. In the United States, Darling Hammond (2003) reported that a range of mentoring and induction programs for beginning teachers have been trialled, along with several educational authorities reviewing pre-service training programs in order to address teacher attrition (Darling-Hammond, 2003). A survey of 718 special education teachers in the United States also found that modification of job design, as well as the provision of administrative support and opportunities for collegiality and professional development proved beneficial in reducing teachers' stress levels (Gersten, Keating, Yovanoff, & Harniss, 2001). In addition, music therapy techniques and school-based counselling groups involving 51 American elementary teachers have also been trialled (Cheek et al., 2003), with some degree of success. These studies are by no means exclusive, all recommending further research into teacher stress, burnout and attrition is required.

In Australia, numerous studies have also investigated the prevalence and prevention of teacher stress amongst primary and secondary teachers, and are described below (Dinham, 1992a; Labone, 2002; Lock, 1993; Louden, 1987; Pithers & Soden, 1998; Wilhelm et al., 2000). These studies have affirmed overseas findings, establishing that teacher stress and burnout is prevalent in Australia, and that there are no quick solutions to developing teacher resiliency.

A 1987 survey involving 15% of the Western Australian teaching population revealed that over 40% primary teachers experience significant psychological stress and 20% experience severe stress through classroom teaching (Louden, 1987). In this study primary teachers' stress was associated with feelings of powerlessness, isolation, time pressures, workload inflexibility, inadequate classroom facilities, student behaviour and involvement in educational research and professional development. A further survey conducted in 1993, involving 264 Western Australian teachers disclosed that incidences of occupational stress had not changed over time (Lock, 1993). Furthermore, the 121 early childhood teachers involved in the study indicated that classroom disruptions and employment

conditions impacted on their stress levels, particularly for those who had taught less than 10 years or were in temporary teaching positions.

Other studies have reported similar findings. Dinham (1992) interviewed 57 teachers who had resigned from the New South Wales (NSW) Department of Education, finding that a range of factors influenced their exodus, not only stress or burnout. In particular, through participants recounting their professional lives and reasons for becoming a teacher and leaving the profession Dinham (1992) identified changing societal attitudes to be a factor impacting on teachers' continuance in teaching. In partnership with other researchers Dinham has continued to study teachers' occupational stress and job satisfaction, both on an Australian and international level. Surveys conducted in Australia, England, New Zealand and the United States involving over 2600 primary and secondary teachers (Dinham & Scott, 2002; Scott, Dinham, & Brooks, 1999), have identified that increased accountability, educational change and the diminished social status of teaching continue to influence teachers' job satisfaction and decisions to leave the profession (Dinham, 1992a, 1994; Scott, Cox, & Dinham, 1999; Scott, Dinham et al., 1999; Scott, Skinner, & Dinham, 2002). Such studies indicate that teacher stress is widespread and continues to be an ongoing issue.

Wilhelm, Dewhurst-Savellis and Parker's (2000) longitudinal study of 156 NSW teachers has also identified key factors that contribute to teacher stress and burnout. Findings from surveys and semi-structured interviews revealed that teachers' unrealistic expectations contributed to teacher attrition. Those teachers who maintained a positive attitude towards teaching were more capable of coping with the demands of their work. Likewise, in another study involving 124 NSW primary teachers (Labone, 2002), survey findings indicated that teacher attitudes, in particular their self-efficacy, enhanced teachers' abilities to cope with work-related stress. Labone (2002) advocated that intervention programs building teacher self-regulation, resiliency and efficacy be implemented to reduce incidences of teacher burnout.

In response to concerns relating to quality teachers and teacher attrition, the Australian Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST) published a

report regarding the status of the Australian teaching profession (Committee for the Review of Teaching and Teacher Education, 2003a). Recommendations were made to attract and maintain teachers in the profession, including developing teacher induction programs, mentoring initiatives, leadership models, team-based cultures and a national framework for professional standards and professional learning for teachers. Ongoing professional learning and career flexibility were considered crucial to teacher morale and retention of teachers within the profession (Committee for the Review of Teaching and Teacher Education, 2003a, 2003b).

The reviewed literature validates that research into teacher retention, stress and burnout is important, particularly when findings can contribute to teachers' sustainment. The literature also reveals that research has not specifically focussed on stress and burnout experienced by early childhood educators. If early childhood teachers are to remain committed to their profession and productively engaged in teaching then research in this area is vital.

Teacher Well-being

Research has investigated the economic well-being of organizations and countries to determine levels of growth and productivity. In recent years, however, a greater focus has been placed on investigating the health and well-being of individuals as well as the organizational structures within societies, in an effort to develop and maintain social prosperity (Cummins, Eckersley, Pallant, van Vugt, & Misajon, 2003; Tetrick, 2002).

Internationally, research has focussed on various aspects of well-being (Diener & Biswas-Diener, 2000; Hammond, 2004; Herman & Hazier, 1999; Sharpe & Smith, 2005; Tetrick, 2002). In a review of literature relating to occupational stress and positive psychology, Tetrick (2002) reveals that research has linked individual ill-health and absenteeism to declines in organizational productivity. Furthermore, pay structures and organizational learning practices have been found to impact on both individual and organizational well-being.

In Canada, the Centre for the Study of Living Standards, has compiled reports on the human and economic well-being of countries involved in the

Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OCED), including the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, Germany, Norway and Sweden (Osberg & Sharpe, 2003; Sharpe & Smith, 2005). While primarily concerned with providing information regarding economic progress, also identified is the need to define the characteristics or domains of well-being and conduct further research in this area.

One such study conducted in the United States revealed that for 155 college students job satisfaction, social relationships and self-regulation are strong predictors of individual well-being (Herman & Hazier, 1999). In the United Kingdom, another study involving interviews with 145 adults identified that learning has a positive impact on psychological health and individual well-being (Hammond, 2004). In Australia, the development of an index measuring subjective well-being has allowed researchers to compare different demographic groups within Australian society (Cummins et al., 2003). Applying the Australian Unity Wellbeing Index to 2000 Australians, researchers identified that country dwellers appear to be more satisfied with their lives than city dwellers, females are more satisfied with their lives than males, and that positive experiences contribute to a rise in personal wellbeing. Ongoing research by Diener and Biswas-Diener (2000) into the subjective well-being (happiness) of Americans and Indians (Biswas-Diener & Diener, 2001; Diener & Biswas-Diener, 2000), using index-based surveys and journal entires, also indicates that multiple measures of subjective well-being and longitudinal studies provide more credible results than previous studies in this area. Such studies highlight that research into well-being is a complex issue and merits continued investigation.

Within the teaching profession, concerns regarding the growing incidence of teacher stress, burnout and attrition have also led to increased focus on teacher well-being (Holmes, 2005; Institute for the Service Professions, 2005). Open to differing interpretations, teacher well-being is considered to be the ability to maintain "harmony between body and mind…a sense of balance…a sense of control over our work" (Holmes, 2005, p. 6). Holmes (2005) also identifies teacher well-being as encompassing the physical, emotional, mental and intellectual and spiritual domains, not solely concerned with the absence of ill-health.

Emotional intelligence is also attributed to be one aspect of teacher well-being (Holmes, 2005). Emotional intelligence refers to the ability to demonstrate self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy and adeptness in relationships (Goleman, 1998, p. 24). Through exercising control of one's emotional competencies teachers strengthen their resilience, initiative, optimism and adaptability. The ability to be aware of and control one's emotions also facilitates teachers dealing with stress-related issues and negative experiences (Epstein, 1998). Emotional intelligence is also considered to contribute to teachers maintaining their teaching effectiveness and personal well-being (Goleman, 1995, 1998; Stein & Book, 2001).

In the United States, articles aimed at promoting teacher well-being also emphasize the need for teachers to develop physical fitness and implement changes to personal practices (Davies, Davies, & Heacock, 2003; Ryel, Bernshausen, & van Tassell, 2002). Teacher resiliency, a component of teacher well-being, is perceived to be enhanced through focussing on meeting basic needs, including adequate rest, exercise and nutrition, particularly when accompanied by collegial and organizational support (Ryel et al., 2002). Davies, Davies and Heacock (2003) make similar recommendations, describing a wellness program developed by an independent K-12 school aimed at improving physical health and fitness in a collegial setting. For the 15 teachers involved in the Weight Watchers component of the program results have been encouraging. Furthermore, students have benefited from interactive workshops and having positive role models (Davies et al., 2003).

In England, the Teacher Support Network, formed in 2001, provides support for teachers to improve their well-being and teaching effectiveness. Originally the Teachers' Benevolent Fund, initiatives, such as the "Teacher Support Line" and "Worklife Support" have been implemented and services extended throughout the United Kingdom (Teacher Support Network, 2001). Recently, the Teacher Support Network collaborated with other support agencies to release a report on the status of school well-being (Teacher Support Network, 2006). This report revealed that although teacher stress is an ongoing issue, the majority of teachers were unaware of available support services. Acknowledged was the need to promote support services

and emphasize the links between teacher wellbeing, student learning and the economic costs to schools.

In Scotland, a national study of teacher health and well-being was conducted in 2004, outlining the status of Scottish teachers' health and support, expected trends and intervention programs for future implementation (Dunlop & Macdonald, 2004). This study, involving 488 teachers, identified that although the majority of Scottish teachers were in good health, teacher stress was prevalent and support fragmented. Recommendations were made to address teacher workload, student indiscipline and relationships within schools, as well as develop personalized health plans and health promotion programs. This study also identified a lack of research-based evidence into effective interventions aimed at maintaining teacher health and well-being.

Research has also been conducted in Western Australia into the well-being of police, nurses and teachers (Institute for the Service Professions, 2005). In surveying 3562 teachers with varying years of teaching experience, the findings revealed that while the participating teachers experienced favourable levels of autonomy, administrative support and leadership and collegial support, concerns arose regarding workplace pressures and professional growth. Those participants who had taught more than 25 years expressed less than positive perceptions of the profession, their workload and organizational loyalty. Participating teachers, regardless of years teaching, also held concerns regarding the status of teaching, their ability to maintain a life-work balance and their personal well-being. Similar findings were evident in survey responses from participating police and nurses. While making no recommendations, the findings were perceived to provide a baseline of well-being within these professions, to be used for discussion and comparison in further studies.

The reviewed literature reveals that well-being is a complex issue, the topic of varied interpretation and research. While the literature identifies concerns regarding current levels of teacher well-being, research into effective intervention strategies and support is limited. Also evident is a lack of research focussed specifically on the health and well-being early childhood teachers, or on how teacher well-being impacts on the sustainment of teachers in the classroom and the well-

being of students. This literature review indicates that teacher well-being is an area meriting further investigation.

Teacher Job Satisfaction and Occupational Motivation

Job satisfaction and occupational motivation are also identified in educational research as complex issues impinging on teacher performance and student learning. One of the qualities of effective teachers is the ability to stay motivated and engaged in the act of teaching (Riner, 2000). Although much has been written about teacher motivation, Yeager (2003) indicates there is a lack of current research into "why some educators teach a lifetime and retire just as motivated as they were on the first day of teaching" (Yeager, 2003, p.11).

Huberman (1993), a forerunner in research on teacher motivation and job satisfaction, investigated 160 Swiss secondary school teachers' career paths and job satisfaction, finding that teachers' job satisfaction came from the enjoyment of the company of young people, the pleasure in sharing knowledge, or the love of a particular subject. Over half of the study's participants who had taught more than 10 years expressed doubts about remaining in the profession, citing incidences of fatigue, frustration, routine and nervous tension as contributing to increased cautiousness, apathy or scepticism. Huberman (1993) noted that teachers rarely reflect on their pedagogical mastery, professional engagement or occupational motivation. While Huberman (1993) made no recommendations, it was suggested that for different teachers their career cycles may be influenced by a different set of factors which require further investigation.

Numerous international studies investigating teachers' job satisfaction also reveal similar findings to those of Huberman (1993), confirming that teacher-pupil relationships are a prime determinant of job satisfaction (Brunetti, 2001; Caprara, Barbaranelli, Borgogni, & Steca, 2003; Davis & Wilson, 2000; Rhodes, Nevill, & Allan, 2004; Shann, 1998; Stanford, 2001; Woods & Weasmer, 2002; Xin & MacMillan, 1999).

For example, a 1998 interview-based study of 200 secondary teachers in the United States found that having a passion for a specific teaching subject, a sense of

autonomy, enjoyment of the classroom environment and collegiality enhances teachers' job satisfaction (Shann, 1998). Similar findings were revealed in a 2001 study of 169 secondary teachers involving the completion of surveys and in-depth interviews (Brunetti, 2001). Furthermore, interviews and a focus group conducted with 10 elementary African-American teachers who had taught more than 10 years (Stanford, 2001), identified that in addition to the previously mentioned factors adequate resourcing, parental support and social support also contributed to their perseverance Stanford (2001) proposed that in having an altruistic reason to teach the interviewed teachers were empowered to persevere in their careers.

Research in Italy (Caprara et al., 2003), involving 2688 secondary teachers compiling self-reports, has also identified that teachers' efficacy, both collective and individual, contributes to teachers' job satisfaction. Surveys conducted in the United Kingdom with 368 primary and secondary teachers (Rhodes et al., 2004) have also disclosed that although current levels of job dissatisfaction are high, teachers considered that the ability to maintain a balance between work and home life contributed to their job satisfaction. Local education authority and school leadership interventions aimed at improving professional experience were also considered to enhance teacher job satisfaction (Rhodes et al., 2004).

Research into teacher job satisfaction and occupational motivation has also taken place in Australia. In 2002, the Department of Education and Training of Western Australia (DET) conducted two surveys of the public teaching workforce: one questioning 521 novice teachers about their choice of teaching as a career, levels of job satisfaction and career aspirations, the other questioning 1720 teachers between 40 and 60 years of age, including early childhood educators, as to their levels of job satisfaction and retirement intentions (Department of Education and Training, 2003a). Findings indicated that teachers are satisfied with the challenging nature of their careers and their ability to make a difference to students' lives. However, the high incidence of change, workplace stress, limited involvement in decision-making and few opportunities for professional advancement impacted on their job satisfaction. The study recommended further structuring of career paths, but did not disclose how workplace stress could be reduced, or job satisfaction sustained.

A national survey investigating the sustainment of 542 Australian teaching professionals (Lokan, 2003), revealed that the intrinsic and altruistic rewards of teaching, gained through working with students, contributed to job satisfaction and sustainment within the profession. Lokan (2003) also found participants valued collegial relationships, support from colleagues and supervisors, involvement in out-of-classroom activities, autonomy of practice, availability of resources and their work conditions.

The notion of teacher empowerment has also been linked to job satisfaction and occupational motivation. Research in the United States has indicated that when teachers are intrinsically motivated and participate in critical decisions concerning school issues, they attain greater job satisfaction and experience a decline in work-related stress (Davis & Wilson, 2000; Edwards, Green, & Lyons, 2002; Pearson & Moomaw, 2005; Wu & Short, 1996). Davis and Wilson's (2000) survey of 44 school principals and 660 elementary teachers also found school principals' empowering behaviours, such as encouragement of collaboration and shared-planning, influenced teachers' job satisfaction. Edwards, Green and Lyons' (2002) inventory-scale survey of 413 elementary teachers revealed similar findings, also identifying teachers' beliefs about their role as learners contributed to personal empowerment and job satisfaction.

Literature relating to the field of early childhood education also promotes teacher empowerment as a source of occupational motivation, recommending teachers adopt new responsibilities, such as self-management of classroom resources and schedules, or develop an emergent curriculum (Moore, 2001; Nimmo, 2002; Pacini, 2000). In taking on new challenges early childhood teachers are perceived to cater for their inherent need to succeed, maintaining their occupational motivation (Pacini, 2000, p.83). Involvement of others and seeking support are also strategies recommended to maintain motivation (Moore, 2001), exemplified in Nimmo's (2002) article recounting an early childhood teacher developing a preschool program on homelessness. Although not research-based, such literature demonstrates that empowering behaviours are perceived to contribute to teachers maintaining job satisfaction and occupational motivation.

While the reviewed literature offers no definitive answer to sustaining teachers' job satisfaction and motivation, it does demonstrate that ongoing research is warranted. If teachers are considered the most important resource in education (Hargreaves & Evans, 1997, p. 3), then efforts should be made to determine what keeps them satisfied and sustained in their teaching practice. Given the lack of research specifically applicable to early childhood teachers this study is of particular relevance.

Teacher Commitment and Engagement

Most teachers commence teaching with high expectations and ideals, but find it difficult to sustain their commitment and engagement when faced with the daily rigours and realities of teaching. Research indicates that professional disillusionment contributes to novice teachers exiting the profession (Danielson, 2002; Wilhelm et al., 2000).

Research conducted in the United States reveals that teachers' professional commitment is linked to job satisfaction and teacher efficacy (Firestone & Pennell, 1993; Joffres & Haughey, 2001; Milner, 2002; Shann, 1998; Wu & Short, 1996). Wu and Short's(1996) survey of 612 teachers indicated that teachers' perceptions of empowerment had a direct influence on their commitment to their profession and to their work. In conducting semi-structured interviews with 14 elementary teachers Joffres and Haughey (2001) found that low feelings of efficacy and community contributed to teachers' experiencing diminished professional commitment Job dissatisfaction and diminished commitment was attributed to a lack of support from administrators, colleagues and parents (Joffres & Haughey, 2001). Furthermore, increased workloads and lack of time also led to diminished commitment (Joffres & Haughey, 2001). In a study of secondary science teachers' professional commitment, Eick (2002) also found that teachers who wanted to make an impact on students were more committed and likely to stay in teaching, than those more interested in the teaching subject. A case study involving an experienced secondary teacher also identified that self-reflection and collegial support contributed to her sustaining professional commitment during critical teaching incidences (Milner, 2002).

In Australia, research involving interviews with 30 Queensland teachers (Crosswell & Elliott, 2004) has also highlighted particular qualities associated with professional commitment. Crosswell and Elliott (2004, p. 6) identified six forms of teacher commitment, including passion, investment of time, meeting student needs, imparting of knowledge, maintaining professional knowledge and engagement in the school community. This study indicated that professional commitment is not solely influenced by external factors and that a link exists between teachers' beliefs and commitment.

In Western Australia, Robison (2001) researched teacher engagement, conducting a series of in-depth interviews with 12 teachers, men and women, both primary and secondary. Robison (2001) concluded that early life experiences, the initial years of teaching, out of school demands and collegiality impacted on teachers being open to change and taking control of their professional lives. Robison did not investigate early childhood educators' beliefs or how teachers' current teaching practices impinged on their commitment and engagement in teaching.

Although current research investigating early childhood teachers' engagement and commitment to teaching is scarce, numerous articles have been specifically written for early childhood teachers to encourage them to be engaged and persevere in their chosen profession (Henderson, 1998; Jaruszewicz, 1999; Kneas, 1999; Moore, 2001; Yeager, 2003; Yoo, 2002). Recommendations include displaying enthusiasm (Yeager, 2003) and nurturing resiliency (Henderson, 1998) through developing their communication skills and engaging in collaboration and goal defining opportunities.

The role of reflective practice is also emphasised by Kneas (1999), Moore (2001) and Jaruszewicz (1999). Early childhood teachers are advised to reflect on strengths and weaknesses and confer with others, developing goals to maintain motivation and focus in teaching. Jaruszewicz (1999) indicates teachers should plan for personal growth as a learner, not just for their students. In addition to engaging in reflective practices, Yoo (2002) encourages early childhood teachers to become lifelong learners, applying their practical knowledge to philosophical approaches and new situations. Yoo (2002) also recommends closer links between colleges and

pre-schools and the use of autobiographical writing, where teachers share written reflections with other teachers.

Whilst these articles are meritorious in their efforts to identify strategies to maintain early childhood teachers' engagement, the apparent lack of research into early childhood teachers' commitment, engagement and sustainability is a concern. If, as Fleer (2001, p. 45) implied, "teachers are informed by research" then further studies into early childhood teacher's engagement and sustainment are required.

Teachers' Knowledge and Learning

Although the past 25 years has seen a wealth of research investigating how teachers learn and what knowledge they value, there appears to be a scarcity of studies linking teachers' knowledge to sustainment in teaching. Instead, educationalists have investigated forms of teachers' knowledge, developing a range of theories on how teachers' knowledge impacts on teachers' teaching practices (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995; Elbaz, 1983; Grossman, 1990; Louden, 1991; Shulman, 1990; Sternberg, 2001).

Such research has lead to a range of understandings into how teachers' knowledge is formed and structured. Elbaz (1983) viewed teachers' practical knowledge as the result of interplay between experiential and theoretical knowledge, influencing teachers' values and beliefs, affecting how a teacher responds to a situation. Shulman (1990, p. 79) referred to teachers' knowledge as "the traditional wisdom of the practitioner." Grossman (1990) developed a framework outlining four areas of teacher knowledge: general pedagogical knowledge, subject matter knowledge, pedagogical content knowledge and knowledge of context. Louden (1991) considered knowledge to be either explicit, such as content, or implicit, such as embodied in practice and combined with true belief. Clandinin and Connelly (1995) focussed on teachers' personal practical knowledge, "that body of convictions and meaning, conscious or unconscious, that have arisen from experience (intimate, social and traditional) and are expressed in a person's practices" (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995, p. 7). Sternberg (2001) also refers to the concepts of practical intelligence and tacit knowledge, teachers "knowing how" (Sternberg, 2001, p. 230) to put pedagogical understandings into practice. These

studies do not disclose how teachers' knowledge influences teacher sustainment, but reveals that teachers' knowledge is a complex issue and merits continued investigation.

Educational literature indicates that ongoing learning is crucial for teachers to cope with changing societal expectations and implement educational change effectively (Day, 1999a; Hargreaves & Evans, 1997). Australian government bodies also acknowledge that teachers need to continue to learn and engage in professional development opportunities to meet work-related commitments and implement educational change (Committee for the Review of Teaching and Teacher Education, 2003a; Department of Education and Training, 2003b; MCEETYA Taskforce on Indigenous Education, 2001).

A search of the literature reveals that numerous articles promote the value of teachers being lifelong learners (Cornford, 2002; Day, 1999a; Livneh & Livneh, 1999; Nevills, 2003; Steffy & Wolfe, 2001). Articles written for early childhood educators link intrinsic motivation to teacher-learning, suggesting early childhood teachers gain motivation through knowing the relevance of further learning (Alexander, 1999; Miller, 2002). In addition, these articles recommend early childhood teachers be provided with adequate resources, time and opportunities to practice skills, achieve success, and maintain new skills and knowledge.

In the United States, a survey of 256 teachers' learning traits also revealed that intrinsic motivation is a driving force behind teachers' participation in professional development (Livneh & Livneh, 1999). Their study found that teachers' learning traits included intellectual curiosity, having specific goals, using learning to overcome a personal crisis and viewing learning as a social outlet or as a means to job advancement, but did not indicate if these same traits lead to teachers' sustainment in their profession.

Day (1999a), in his book "The Challenges of Lifelong Learning," outlines the characteristics of effective teacher-learning, including the need to be lifelong, self-managed, supported and resourced, beneficial to both teacher and school and an accounting process based on individual needs. Teachers are also considered to need

to develop critical thinking skills and emotional intelligence (Day, 1999a, p. 34), if they are to provide ongoing quality instruction to meet students' individual needs. In addition, reflective thinking practices also contribute to effective teacher-learning, particularly when teachers work through varied forms of reflection and employ coaching or mentoring methods (Day, 1999b; Loughran, 1996; Schon, 1987).

Educational literature also indicates that teacher-learning should build upon existing knowledge, be practised, engaging and self-regulatory (Cornford, 2002; Nevills, 2003). Cornford (2002) outlines cognitive and meta-cognitive learning strategies used to keep pace with technological advancement, including knowledge of self as a learner, self-discipline and self-judgement: skills developed through reflection. Similarly, Nevills' (2003) article linking neuroscience research on brain development to adult-learning models, indicates that appropriate professional development leads to teachers being engaged and sustained in the learning process. While the above articles do not refer to teacher sustainment, they do indicate that active participation in the learning process leads teachers maintaining an interest in learning, implementing new practices in their teaching and improving the quality of student education.

The reviewed literature verifies that teachers' knowledge is a complex issue and worthy of ongoing research. The literature also indicates that educationalists and governmental authorities consider intrinsic motivation, lifelong learning and professional development facilitate teachers coping with the demands of their profession. As research into early childhood teachers' knowledge of sustainment is limited, further investigation is necessary to identify what other knowledge, or factors, contributes to teachers' sustainment.

Teacher Career Development

During their professional lives teachers are perceived to progress through different stages of development, demonstrating changing levels of competency and engagement in the teaching process and profession. Several models of teacher career development have been proposed in an attempt to explain how teacher knowledge, competency levels and effective engagement evolves (Huberman, 1993; Katz, 1972; Steffy, 1989; Steffy & Wolfe, 2001). An examination of the literature regarding

teacher career development contributes to a deeper understanding of the nature of sustainment. Three models of teacher career development are described, as follows, identifying their links to teacher sustainment.

Katz (1972) proposed a model of preschool teachers' development, based on four stages:

1. Survival- in the first year of teaching, where teachers are concerned with coping on a daily basis;
2. Consolidation- in the second and third years of teaching, where teachers display greater interest on addressing student needs;
3. Renewal- in the third and fourth years of teaching, where teachers extend their practice and knowledge, engaging in acts of collaboration;
4. Maturity- in the fifth year of teaching, where teachers are confident in their competence and continue to extend their professional knowledge and engagement.

Katz's (1972) model implies that teacher competency is linked to years of teaching experience. While this career model fails to explicitly state if preschool teachers maintain effective engagement for the duration of their teaching careers, a peer-mentoring program based on Katz's (1972) model suggests that teacher sustainment is dependent on teachers' life experiences (Stroot et al., 1998). Using Katz's model of career development, The Peer Assistance and Review Program (Stroot et al., 1998) indicates that teachers move between stages of development according to personal and professional experiences. In this program teacher sustainment is considered to be determined by teachers balancing commitments and coping with changing circumstances.

Based on research into Swiss secondary school teachers' job satisfaction, Huberman (1993) developed a seven-stage model outlining the professional life cycle of teachers:

1. Survival and Discovery- in the first 2 to 3 years of teaching, where teachers face the realities of day-to-day teaching;
2. Stabilization- after 4 to 6 years of teaching, where teachers demonstrate increased professional commitment, pedagogical mastery and less focus on self;

3. Experimentation and Diversification- between and 7 and 25 years of teaching, where teachers experience heightened engagement and proactive self-improvement;

Or/and

4. Reassessment- between 15 and 25 years of teaching, where teachers experience increased self-doubt or disenchantment, in varying degrees;
5. Serenity and Relational Distance- between 26 to 33 years of teaching, where teachers are less vulnerable and ambitious, displaying greater tolerance and confidence;

Or/and

6. Conservatism and Complaints- between 26 and 33 years of teaching, where teachers are less tolerant and adaptive to change;
7. Disengagement- between 34 to 40 years of teaching, where teachers are either serene or bitter and devote more time to themselves.

A model often referred to in studies, Huberman's (1993) professional life cycle of teachers has been used as a basis for discussion in several studies investigating teacher job satisfaction and commitment (Bruner, 1991; Brunetti, 2001; Crosswell & Elliott, 2002). While not prescriptive, or perceived to strictly adhere to given time frames, this model proposes that years of teaching experience do not necessarily contribute to sustaining effective teaching practice or engagement in the profession. Furthermore, Huberman's (1993) model implies that teachers' performance tends to peak mid-way in their teaching careers, making teacher sustainment an unlikely occurrence in the later stages of their careers.

In contrast, another model of teacher career development, based on constructivist principles (Steffy, 1989; Steffy & Wolfe, 2001), indicates that given an appropriate learning environment, teachers will continue to grow and develop in their teaching roles. Steffy and Wolfe (2001, p. 16) outline a six phase life-cycle model of professional development for teachers:

1. Novice- pre-service to second year of teaching, when teachers first experience day-to-day teaching;

2. Apprentice- second to third year of teaching, where integration of knowledge, pedagogy and confidence develop in teacher planning and instruction
3. Professional- teachers grow in self-confidence and respond to student feedback
4. Expert- teachers achieve high standards in all areas
5. Distinguished- teachers exceed current expectations in knowledge and engagement in the profession
6. Emeritus- teachers experience a lifetime of achievement.

Steffy and Wolfe (2001, p. 17) also refer to Mezirow's concept of transformative learning, where teachers work through a process of reflection-renewal-growth to progress through stages of professional development. Within this model failure to engage in transformative learning, contributes to limited extension of teachers' learning and withdrawal or retrogression in the developmental cycle. Steffy and Wolfe's (2001) model implies that teacher sustainment is dependant on teachers engaging in reflective practice and maintaining commitment to their profession.

While the reviewed models of teacher career development are not exclusive they do reveal that differing theories exist regarding how teachers develop and maintain teacher competency and engagement in the profession. The reviewed models also imply that teacher sustainment is attainable, though appears to be of a transitory nature. The review of models of teacher development contributes to the discussion of this investigation's findings, found in Chapter Seven.

Summary

This chapter highlights the importance of early childhood teaching and the complex nature of teachers' work. Acknowledged is the worldwide growth of early childhood education and increased participation of young children in formal education settings. Also disclosed is research validating the benefits of quality early learning experiences on child development and long-term productive participation in society.

The reviewed literature outlined how changing societal expectations and the popularisation of educational philosophies have impacted on the beliefs and practices of early childhood teachers and contributed to governments making reforms within the early childhood system. Reference was made to changes in curricula, inclusion practices and administration and accountability processes, concluding that such factors add to the complex and changing nature of early childhood teachers' work, ultimately effecting early childhood teachers' sustainment in their profession.

Furthermore, the literature revealed that the teaching profession, as a whole, is continually facing change and upheaval. Not only are ongoing educational reforms redefining teachers' work, but an ageing trend within the profession is apparent, accompanied by increasing incidences of teacher-stress and burnout. Changes in teachers' levels of engagement, job satisfaction, occupational motivation and well-being, are reported as contributing to teacher disillusionment, disengagement and attrition. A multitude of factors are seen to impact on teachers' professional commitment and productive engagement in teaching.

The reviewed literature also identified a lack of research focussing specifically on what sustains teachers' motivation and productive engagement within their profession over an extended period of time. In addition, the literature disclosed that few researchers have studied early childhood teachers or investigated how early childhood teachers respond to educational change, stress, burnout and other impacts on their teaching. Furthermore, research on the link between teacher knowledge and sustainment is scarce.

Given the current trends concerning the characteristics of Australian teachers, teacher sustainment is a topic that merits continued study. The literature review confirms that further research is required to identify ways to reverse current trends of attrition and disillusionment amongst teachers, and to sustain teachers' professional commitment, job satisfaction and effective engagement in the teaching process. The literature review also confirms that the field of early childhood education is of great significance, and that its' educators have often been overlooked in research. If early childhood teachers are to be sustained in their profession,

providing quality education for their students, then they should be informed of factors that can assist in their sustainment. This study is one such attempt to address these issues.

In the next chapter the theoretical and conceptual framework pertaining to this study is outlined, with reference to relevant literature.

CHAPTER THREE: THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The purpose of research is to define or refine information about a particular phenomena, occurrence or event. Research is based on paradigms, “a basic set of beliefs that guide action” (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, p. 99). These paradigms determine how researchers view the world and how they are guided in their inquiry and acquisition of knowledge (Wittrock, 1986). The chosen paradigm influences the researcher’s selection and implementation of methodology, and the analysis and interpretation of findings. Ultimately, the goal of research is to gain insights into the world that are reliable and valid, in accordance with the researcher’s held beliefs, or paradigm.

This chapter first describes the theoretical perspectives underpinning this research, and second, examines the key concepts impacting on this investigation. An illustration of the conceptual framework (see Figure 1) is provided, accompanied by a description of the various factors potentially impacting on teacher sustainment.

The Theoretical Framework

All research seeks to develop clarity about the world and people who live in it. Within the field of qualitative research exists a range of paradigms that guide researchers in their quest to understand a given phenomena, and develop an understanding of the “truth” as they perceive it to be. Each belief system determines how the researcher approaches their study, implements an investigation and analyses and verifies the findings. The beliefs that drive a study lead the researcher to develop rich descriptions portraying the realities of participants as the “truth,” in accordance with the researcher’s chosen paradigm (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994).

The chosen theoretical framework for this study is the constructivist paradigm, also known as “naturalistic inquiry” (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 105). Constructivist beliefs perceive the world to be inherently complex, where experiences are unique to the individual, depending on the social milieu in which they live. Individuals are seen to use their existing knowledge to make sense of and interpret new experiences, reconstructing past knowledge to develop new knowledge

and understandings (Schwandt, 1994). Consequently, knowledge is ever changing and constructions of reality are unique to the individual.

Background to Constructivism

Constructivist beliefs were first espoused by Giambattisa Vico, a 17th century philosopher (Prouix, 2006; von Glasersfeld, 1997, 2003). Vico argued that "the human mind can know only what the human mind has made" (von Glasersfeld, 2003, p. 3). Rational knowledge was regarded as arising from an individual's experiences and that only God had a true understanding of reality. Vico also considered knowledge was to be judged according to the "fit" or "viability" to the world as we know it (Prioux, 2006, p. 3). Constructivism was based on the understanding that the truth is subjective, at best an adequate fit, and that knowledge is dependent on the learner.

Several constructivists, including Piaget, Vygotsky, Bruner and von Glasersfeld have developed theories to explain the nature of knowledge and learning (Lambert & Clyde, 2000; Prouix, 2006; von Glasersfeld, 2003; Wellington, 2000). In particular, Piaget's contributions to developmental psychology are thought to be the basis of modern constructivist beliefs. Piaget considered knowledge to be active and fluid, constructed through exposure to practical experiences and the processes of assimilation and accommodation. Piaget proposed that knowledge is a process of adaptation, a way of understanding and coping with the world in which individuals live (Prouix, 2006; von Glasersfeld, 1997).

Others have expanded on the role socialization plays in knowledge acquisition, developing theories of social constructivism. Vygotsky emphasized that cognition is a social phenomenon, whereby language and dialogue are an integral part of the learning process. Outlining the Zone of Proximal Development as:

> the distance between the actual development level as determined by independent problem-solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers…" (Berk & Winsler, 1995, p. 26),

Vygotsky proposed that learning of higher order skills is best developed through the guidance and support of a more competent person (Berk & Winsler, 1995; MacNaughton & Williams, 2004). Bruner also considered learning to be an active

social process in which the individual constructs new ideas based on current knowledge and dialogue. Within the educational context, Bruner advocated that structured experiences of increasing difficulty contribute to enhancing individuals' acquisition of knowledge (Lambert & Clyde, 2000).

Von Glasersfeld revisited Vico and Piaget's views on the construction of knowledge and developed a theory of "radical constructivism," (Prioux, 2006, p. 1), which reiterated that there are no certainties, only viable hypotheses. Radical constructivism is based on the following principles (von Glasersfeld, 2003, p. 3):

1-a) Knowledge is not passively received either through the senses or by way of communication;

-b) knowledge is actively built up by the cognizing subject.

2 –a) the function of cognition is adaptive, in the biological sense of the term, tending towards fit or viability;

-b) cognition serves the subject's organization of the experiential world, not the discovery of an objective ontological reality.

Radical constructivism considers knowledge to be a human construction, "the conceptual means of making sense of experience" (von Glasersfeld, 2003, p. 6).

The outlined theories form the basis of this study's theoretical framework. Such models of constructivist theory demonstrate that constructivism is a dynamic approach to knowledge and learning. According to radical constructivist beliefs, no single theory can be considered a certainty. The existence of varied interpretations of constructivism appears to substantiate the underlying paradigm adopted by this study: that knowledge is an individual, active and cognitive construction of experience.

Constructivist Beliefs in This Study

In research, the aim of the constructivist researcher is to understand and reconstruct meanings of what participants perceive to be true or real about a specific concept or phenomena (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). The researcher values the uniqueness of each participant's contributions and attempts to accurately depict participants' knowledge: their perceptions of reality. Interactions between the researcher and the participants act as a clarifying process, ensuring the researcher

develops a shared understanding of what each participant holds to be true, for that particular time and place. In accordance with constructivist paradigms, the researcher strives to develop findings that are credible, dependable and confirmable (Drisko, 1997; Scott & Usher, 1999). In this study the aim of the researcher is to accurately depict early childhood teachers' understandings of factors that contribute to sustainment in the profession and in their teaching practice.

In adopting constructivist beliefs as the theoretical framework, this study assumes that early childhood teachers' beliefs and knowledge varies according to individual circumstances and experiences. Having come from differing familial, social, educational and pre-service training backgrounds, early childhood teachers have undergone a diverse range of experiences prior to becoming members of the teaching profession. Furthermore, their career paths within the teaching profession are not identical. Factors, such as years of teaching experience, work location and environment, year levels of students, relationships with students, professional colleagues and administrators, school cultures, and employer's organizational structure contribute to early childhood teachers developing their own understandings regarding the realities of teaching. Consequently, participating early childhood teachers' knowledge of what sustains them in the teaching profession and their teaching practice is varied but viable to their particular reality.

In addition, based on the constructivist belief that knowledge is active and changing, this study accepts that the findings arising from this investigation may not be participants' definitive realities. Rather, this study considers that what is disclosed in this investigation is a portrayal of early childhood teachers' beliefs and understandings, at a given place and time. Such knowledge changes through exposure to subsequent experiences, resulting in new and differing constructions of knowledge. This occurrence also leads to the understanding that early childhood teachers are lifelong learners, continually constructing and reconstructing their knowledge through life and teaching experiences (Gustavsson, 2002).

This study also recognises that early childhood teachers may develop common understandings of key factors contributing to their sustainment. From a radical constructivist perspective, when individuals develop understandings which

are “compatible” or “intersubjective” (Proiux, 2006, p. 5), the derived knowledge is still perceived to be valid for the individuals involved. In this instance, knowledge does not need to be identical, but compatible, indicating a common ground of agreement. As many early childhood teachers are female and work in similar social milieus, even though specific events and incidents may differ, similar situations arise. Exposure to such experiences contributes to early childhood teachers constructing common knowledge that “fits” with both their realities and those of their professional colleagues. In this study both forms of participant knowledge, unique and compatible, are considered valid.

Social constructivist theory also identifies the role of socialization in the construction of knowledge (Berk & Winsler, 1995; Lambert & Clyde, 2000). This study acknowledges that aspects of early childhood teachers’ knowledge of sustainment may be constructed through socialization with professional peers. Working closely with professional colleagues and affiliating with professional associations is a part of early childhood teachers’ professional practice. In addition, many early childhood teachers engage in acts of collaboration or mentoring which influence the construction of their knowledge. Consequently, this study recognizes that teacher socialization and collegial relationships may contribute to increasing the likelihood of common understandings arising. However, regardless of whether knowledge of sustainment is unique or common, in this study each participant’s contributions are valued.

This study has adopted the constructivist paradigm as the theoretical framework in order to understand the multiple realities of early childhood teachers. In describing early childhood teachers’ knowledge of sustainment, this study attempts to generate knowledge that is viable and relative to the participants involved in the study. At the same time this study strives to construct knowledge that maintains coherency and credibility (Scott & Usher, 1999), so that an empathetic awareness of the realities of early childhood teachers and the nature of their work can be developed.

In addition to outlining the theoretical framework of this study, key understandings which impact on this investigation are also disclosed. The inclusion

of a conceptual framework provides a link to the research questions and research design. The framework also acts a frame of reference for discussion and contributes to the trustworthiness of the study (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

The Conceptual Framework

Research is concerned with the pursuit of knowledge, as is this study. According to the theoretical framework adopted in this study, the constructivist perspective, knowledge is active and ever-changing, constructed and reconstructed through experience (Schwandt, 1994). In this study one of the basic premises is that early childhood teachers have knowledge of sustainment, and that this knowledge is a result of their experiences.

Constructivist beliefs perceive the world to be inherently complex (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Within early childhood teachers' lives they have been exposed to a myriad of experiences, each impacting on their perceptions of reality and contributing to the construct of new knowledge and realities. Consequently, the many factors that contribute to early childhood teachers' life and professional experiences have the potential to impact on their sustainment in the profession and in teaching.

A diagrammatical representation of the conceptual framework that shapes this study is shown in Figure 1. This diagram outlines the multiple forces that have the potential to contribute to early childhood teachers' knowledge and subsequent sustainment in the profession and in teaching. This study also acknowledges that the impacting forces included in the conceptual framework are not exclusive. Depending on the individual, and the experiences they undergo, differing factors come into play and influence their construction of knowledge. To include a limitless range of factors within the diagrammatical representation is not feasible. Rather, the potential forces appearing in the conceptual framework (see Figure 1.) have been selected on the basis of being identified in the reviewed literature as impacting on traits associated to sustainment. Including such factors serves to indicate the complex nature of teacher knowledge and sustainment.

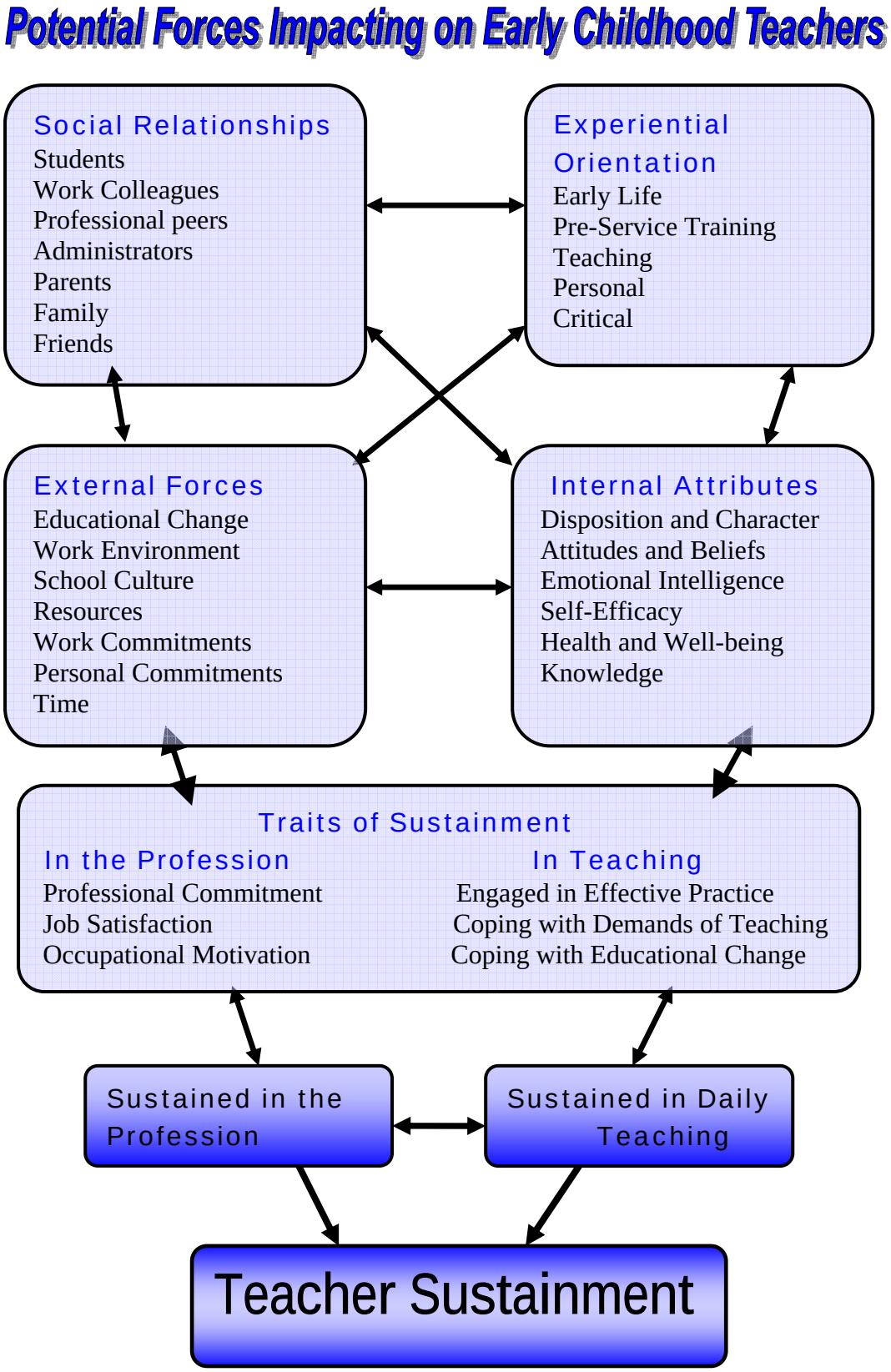

Figure1. Conceptual Framework illustrating potential forces impacting on early childhood teachers' ability to be sustained in the profession and in teaching.

In order to develop a coherent depiction of the potential forces influencing the construction of early childhood teachers' knowledge and sustainment, factors identified in the reviewed literature are grouped according to common themes: social relationships, experiential orientation, internal attributes and external forces.

According to constructivist beliefs, early childhood teachers' construction of knowledge is influenced through their interacting and developing relationships with a range of persons. In this study's conceptual framework these potential sources of interaction are grouped under the heading of social relationships. In particular, the reviewed literature has noted that relationships with students and work colleagues impact on traits associated with sustainment (Brunetti, 2001; Lokan, 2003). Also included are professional peers and administrators (Crosswell & Elliott, 2002; Woods & Weasmer, 2002), as well as parents (Stanford, 2001) and family and friends (Pithers & Soden, 1998; Stanford, 2001).

This study also considers that early childhood teachers have undergone past experiences that facilitate adaptation and assimilation of new experiences, contributing to their knowledge and sustainment in the profession and teaching. The reviewed literature indicates that particular experiences have contributed to teachers' continuance in the profession (Milner, 2002; Robison, 2001). Robison (2001) revealed that early life experiences and the initial years of teaching were significant, while Milner (2002) indicated that critical incidents, both personal and teaching, contributed to teacher resiliency and retention.

Furthermore, this study acknowledges that the internal attributes of teachers may influence how new experiences are interpreted and constructed into knowledge contributing to their sustainment. Potential factors identified in the reviewed literature include teacher dispositions and character (Crosswell & Elliott, 2004; Hare, 1993; Peterson & Seligman, 2004), attitudes and beliefs (Bobek, 2002; Lokan, 2003; Nieto, 2003; Scott et al., 2002; Stanford, 2001), emotional intelligence (Day, 1999a; Goleman, 1995, 1998; Stein & Book, 2001), self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997; Caprara et al., 2003; Howard & Johnson, 2004) and health and well-being (Dunlop & Macdonald, 2004; Holmes, 2005; Houghton, 2001; Institute for the Service Professions, 2005). In keeping with constructivist beliefs, this study also considers

that early childhood teachers' existing knowledge, both personal and practical (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995), to be another internal attribute that contributes to construction of teacher knowledge and sustainment.

Also included in the conceptual framework are external forces impacting on early childhood teachers' work. Potential factors identified in the reviewed literature include educational change (Committee for the Review of Teaching and Teacher Education, 2003b; Hargreaves, 1994; Hargreaves et al., 2001; Hargreaves & Evans, 1997; Hargreaves et al., 1998; Scott, Cox et al., 1999; Smylie, 1999) and the work environment (Lock, 1993; Lokan, 2003; Louden, 1987). The school culture, such as degrees of autonomy (Brunetti, 2001; Gersten et al., 2001; Lokan, 2003), collaboration (Hargreaves & Evans, 1997; Lokan, 2003) and involvement in decision-making (Davis & Wilson, 2000; Department of Education and Training, 2003a; Vandenberghe & Huberman, 1999) are also noted, as are resources (Lokan, 2003; Stanford, 2001) and early childhood teachers' work and personal commitments (Institute for the Service Professions, 2005; Robison, 2001). Furthermore, time is listed as a potential force, as time allocation and management (Bernard, 1990; Holmes, 2005; Louden, 1987) is perceived to contribute to early childhood teachers balancing commitments, facilitating their sustainment .

In addition to the potential forces impacting on early childhood teachers, this study's conceptual framework includes the various traits identified in the literature as associated with teacher sustainment (Lokan, 2003; Shann, 1998; Woods & Weasmer, 2002). In this study sustainment in the teaching profession relates to maintaining professional commitment, job satisfaction and occupational motivation, while sustainment in daily teaching relates to maintaining effective engagement in the teaching process, coping with the daily demands associated with teaching and coping with the implementation of educational change.

In adhering to constructivist beliefs, this study considers that the degree to which impacting forces influence an individual teacher's traits of sustainment varies. As knowledge is considered to be fluid and ever changing (von Glasersfeld, 1997), so too are the potential forces impacting on individual early childhood teachers. Exposure to such forces contributes to early childhood teachers making sense of

their realities, rationalizing their commitments and engagement in the profession and in teaching. In this study an early childhood teacher's experiences are perceived to facilitate construction of such knowledge, uniquely reinforcing or diminishing sustainment either in the profession, teaching practice, or both.

The conceptual framework of this study provides a basis on which to investigate the meaning potential forces hold in relation to teacher sustainment. Through qualitative methodology, involving open-ended questioning, early childhood teachers recount the factors that contribute to traits associated to teacher sustainment: professional commitment, job satisfaction, occupational motivation and engagement in effective teaching practices. In addition, this study's participants identify factors they perceive impinge on their coping with the daily demands of teaching and implementation of educational change. Such disclosures lead to an appreciation of how early childhood teachers construct, adapt and apply knowledge to their teaching, sustaining their daily practice.

Early childhood teachers' recounts of critical incidents in their teaching careers also enhance this study, leading to a deeper understanding of how early childhood teachers' knowledge, beliefs and attitudes impact on their teaching. In divulging critical teaching experiences early childhood teachers reveal the external factors, as well as internal attributes, that contribute to their sustainment. Reflection on critical experiences facilitates participants' construction of knowledge, further defining what factors are critical to their sustainment in teaching.

In keeping with constructivist principles, the knowledge derived from this study is not considered fixed or defined, but is ever-changing. Indeed, early childhood teachers' participation in this study may be a further factor impacting on their sustainment, as the process of recounting and reflecting refines teachers' understandings and leads to the reconstruction of new knowledge. Such is the nature of reality in a constructivist world.

In the next chapter the background to the chosen methodology is described. An outline of the research design and a description of the study's participants is

provided, as well as forms of data collection and analysis. Furthermore, the limitations of the study and ethical considerations related to this study are discussed.

CHAPTER FOUR: METHODOLOGY

For research to be considered credible and authentic, investigations should be based on a sound rationale that justifies the use of chosen methodology and the processes involved in data collection and analysis. By adopting a rigorous approach to research design, an investigation's findings are seen to be valid, trustworthy and a true depiction of the realities held by the participants in the study (Grbich, 1999).

This chapter describes the methodology adopted by this study. The first section examines the methodological background, outlining the theoretical basis for the chosen methodology. The second section identifies the research methods, describing the background and justification for the chosen methods. The third section examines the research design and procedure. Practical aspects are described, including the participants, the ethics clearance process, phases of data collection and analysis of data. Finally, an outline of the study's limitations and ethical considerations is provided.

Methodological Background

Educational research investigates features within a system for the purpose of gaining knowledge that will lead to an improvement in the quality and delivery of education (Fullan & Stiegelbauer, 1991). In the quest for information, educational research utilizes two forms of investigation: quantitative and qualitative research.

Quantitative research is concerned with viewing human reality in terms of systematic measurement, analysing defined variables, often considered fixed or controlled and constant (Burns, 1998; Rosnov & Rosenthal, 1996). Such research adopts an evidence-based approach and attempts to objectively present findings in precise, simplistic or statistical terms (Somekh & Lewin, 2005). Findings from quantitative investigations may be generalized and considered reproducible or representative of a given population. In education, quantitative studies have been conducted to depict changing demographics in the teaching population (Department of Education and Training, 2002a, 2002b; Kirby, 2002; National Association of Community Based Children's Services (NACBCS), 2003). While quantitative research allows researchers to make statements about the relationships between

cause and effect, the complex nature of human perception and behaviour is not always taken into consideration (Burns, 1998).

In contrast, qualitative research attempts to gain an intimate understanding of a given phenomena, within certain contexts (Grbich, 1999; Pring, 2000). As Denzin and Lincoln (2000, p.3) states, “qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them.” Such investigations are concerned with providing rich descriptions of the individual’s point of view and their dealings in the social world. While not considered replicable or generalizable, findings from qualitative research provides information on “how social experience is created and given meaning” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 8).

In the field of education, qualitative research practices have been used extensively to investigate teachers’ beliefs and practices (Burnaford, Fischer, & Hobson, 2001; Clandinin & Connelly, 1995; Loughran, 1999; Scott & Usher, 1999; Wellington, 2000). Information derived from such studies has provided an insight into the realities of those working within the teaching profession. As this study is also concerned with investigating teachers’ beliefs and practices, qualitative research methodology has been chosen to investigate early childhood teachers’ sustainment in the profession and in teaching. Qualitative understandings and paradigms relating to this study are further described below.

Qualitative Understandings

Qualitative research is concerned with examining and interpreting the world in terms of quality, rather than quantity. While differing beliefs, perspectives and ideologies exist within the field of qualitative research, common understandings are also shared as to what makes a study suited to qualitative investigation (Burns, 1998; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). These shared understandings are briefly described, identifying why this study is suited to adopting such an approach.

Firstly, qualitative research focuses on investigating the social world of human beings, in particular, individuals’ perceptions of their experiences and how they operate within their social milieu. Qualitative research has been used

extensively in the social sciences, including the field of education (Somekh & Lewin, 2005; Wittrock, 1986), to investigate human behaviour and beliefs and how people operate in their everyday settings. This study is also concerned with examining human perceptions and the differing realities of social engagement and interaction. In this particular instance, early childhood teachers' beliefs and perceptions of experiences in their teaching careers are the centre of focus.

Secondly, qualitative research accepts that human knowledge and beliefs are not fixed or static, but vary according to the individual and his, or her, exposure to new and changing circumstances (Wellington, 2000). The qualitative ontology and epistemology considers that reality is relative to the individual, and that "truth" is subjective and may hold multiple meanings (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). That being the case, research findings may be unique to the participants of a particular investigation and not replicable or transferable. In keeping with these qualitative understandings, this study accepts that although commonalities may exist amongst early childhood teachers who have undergone similar experiences, widespread generalisations cannot be made. What one early childhood teacher may believe or experience in their working lives may vary and hold differing meanings for other teachers.

Thirdly, qualitative research seeks to develop rich descriptions of the social world of human beings (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Consequently, qualitative researchers employ a range of interpretive practices to gain a better understanding of the complex nature of individual human behaviour in a particular place or point of time (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Various methodological approaches are utilized, incorporating a range of interview and observational techniques (Grbich, 1999). This study also recognizes the diversity and multiplicity of factors impacting on people's lives. A range of data collection tools are also employed in this study in the attempt to develop rich and deep descriptions of early childhood teachers' working lives and their sustainment in the teaching profession.

Fourthly, qualitative investigations consider the researcher to be an integral part of the research process, where research methodology is chosen and adopted in accordance with the researcher's particular beliefs or theoretical perspective (Burns, 1998; Grbich, 1999). The researcher's paradigm determines how the study's

participants' realities are examined, analysed and described. The ultimate aim of the researcher is to portray the "truth" as he, or she, perceives it to be (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). In this study the researcher accepts that her own background as an early childhood educator may influence her perspective. At the same time common experiences also allow the researcher to develop rapport and shared understandings with the study's participants, contributing to the development of rich and thick descriptions of early childhood teachers' sustainment. In keeping with qualitative understandings, this study acknowledges that the researcher's adherence to constructivist and interpretivist perspectives shapes the study's research design and interpretation of findings.

Furthermore, qualitative research relies on methodology that is dialectical, involving approaches where dialogue between the researcher and participants leads to the shaping of ideas and common understandings (Somekh & Lewin, 2005). In accordance with qualitative beliefs, this study also utilizes research methodology that relies on communication between the researcher and early childhood teachers. Through engaging in dialogue with participants, in focus group and case study interviews, this study further explores early childhood teachers' perceptions of sustainment in teaching to gain greater insights into key factors influencing their sustainment.

This study is suited to qualitative investigation as it adheres to the qualitative belief that the aim and purpose of human inquiry is to investigate the uniqueness of human experiences, discovering how individuals make sense of their world (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). This study respects the subjective nature of knowledge, acknowledges the role of the researcher in the study and uses multiple, dialectical methodology in an attempt to provide rich descriptions of early childhood teachers' sustainment in their profession and in teaching in the classroom.

The Interpretivist Perspective

Within qualitative research differing approaches exist, each determining how data is collected and interpreted. While constructivist beliefs are the basis of this study's conceptual framework, interpretivist beliefs are considered suited to the collection and analysis of data relating to early childhood teachers' sustainment.

The interpretivist perspective is closely associated with constructivist beliefs. Both qualitative approaches examine everyday experiences and how meaning is constructed (Scott & Usher, 1999). Both paradigms also adhere to the belief that “in order to understand the world of meaning, one must interpret it” (Schwandt, 1994, p. 118). However, the interpretivist perspective places particular emphasis on interpreting and understanding the meaning of social phenomena such as teacher sustainment (Schwandt, 1998), making it suited to the collection and analysis of data pertaining to this investigation.

This study accepts that the researcher is required to interpret early childhood teachers’ comments to make sense of their experiences. Using the hermeneutic circle, where the researcher collects data, interprets it, then repeats the process after each phase of data collection (Grbich, 1999, p. 123), this study strives to construct and reconstruct knowledge gained from the first phase of data collection and each interview with case study participants, to ultimately disclose a deep and clear insight into the nature of teacher sustainment and how early childhood teachers are sustained in their profession.

An interpretivist approach also relies heavily on the use of language, recognizing the existence of common meanings assigned to words within group cultures (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). In this study the adopted methodology allows for the clarification of words and the development of shared understandings. Both focus groups and in-depth interviews depend upon dialogical interpretation, a negotiation of shared understandings between the researcher and participants (Grbich, 1999). In addition, similar professional orientations held by the researcher and participants facilitate a shared interpretation of language, enhancing the study’s credibility or truthfulness (Drisko, 1997).

As the researcher attempts to make sense of participants’ experiences, the quality of interpretation is dependent on the quality of information made available. In this study multiple forms of sampling are used, as well as opportunities for authentication and clarification, so that rich and thick descriptions of participants’ knowledge and beliefs are developed. In accordance with constructivist and interpretivist paradigms this study strives to develop findings that are credible,

dependable and confirmable (Drisko, 1997), accurately depicting participants' understandings of factors that contribute to their sustainment in teaching.

Research Methods

When teachers are exposed to new and sometimes challenging experiences, their beliefs and knowledge are uniquely altered, resulting in the construction of new knowledge. The purpose of this study was to investigate those factors that contribute to early childhood teachers' experiences and construction of knowledge relating to sustainment. Qualitative research practices, including descriptive surveys, focus groups and in-depth semi-structured interviews were the chosen research methodology in this study, used to facilitate the identification and description of key factors sustaining early childhood teachers in the profession and in teaching.

Surveys

Surveys have been widely used in qualitative educational research to identify and describe teachers' understandings of their teaching experiences (Scott & Usher, 1999). Numerous studies in educational research have relied on surveys to collect data on teachers' professional commitment, job satisfaction and occupational motivation (Angus & Olney, 2001; Brunetti, 2001; Department of Education and Training, 2003a; Fleer, 2000; Huberman, 1993; Livneh & Livneh, 1999; Lokan, 2003; Robison, 2001; Shann, 1998).

Surveys comprising of predetermined factors present a broad and general picture of a subject, often involving a wide sample of participants from different educational settings (Jaeger, 1997). Many of the studies in the reviewed literature provide information considered representative of all sectors of the teaching population (Brunetti, 2001; Davis & Wilson, 2000; Hakanen et al., 2006; Livneh & Livneh, 1999; Lock, 1993; Lokan, 2003; Shann, 1998). Rating scales and inventories, such as a Maslach's Burnout Inventory (Whitehead et al., 2000) and the Occupational Stress Inventory (Pithers & Soden, 1998), also give a general indication of teachers' professional well-being. These survey formats identify the degree to which pre-determined factors are prevalent within the teaching profession, rather than the diverse understandings held by teachers; the intent of this study.

In contrast, surveys composed of open-ended questions, also known as descriptive surveys (Burns, 1998, p. 467), allow for unrestricted responses from participants. In educational research, descriptive surveys have been less frequently applied (Lokan, 2003; Tatar & Yahav, 1999; Young, 1998), yet provide an intimate insight into the nature of teachers' work. Descriptive surveys are suited to studies involving a small number or distinct group of participants, such as early childhood teachers (Burns, 1998). Although data analysis can prove time consuming, descriptive surveys facilitate research participants recounting personal understandings and beliefs about teaching.

In this study, descriptive surveys were adopted as part of the first phase of data collection. This form of research methodology was considered compatible with interpretivist beliefs and allowed for diversity in response. As a select group of participants were involved in this study descriptive surveys were also considered suited to the study's collection of data. Open-ended surveys designed to investigate traits of sustainment, including teachers' professional commitment, job satisfaction, occupational motivation, effective teaching practice, coping with the daily demands of teaching and educational change and critical incidents in teaching, were employed to identify and describe factors impacting on early childhood teachers' sustainment in the profession and in teaching.

Interviews

Interviews have been widely applied in qualitative research as a means of data collection (Burns, 1998; Fontana & Frey, 2000; Grbich, 1999). While interviewing can take many forms, face-to-face interviewing is a common practice employed in qualitative research, used to gain insights into people's perceptions of their lives (Fontana & Frey, 2000). Interviews are also widely used in educational research, identifying how various factors impact on teachers' beliefs and work (Scott & Usher, 1999; Wellington, 2000; Wittrock, 1986).

Face-to face interviews facilitate participants disclosing their personal insights into a given phenomena. Interviews can be structured or semi-structured, depending on the intent of the researcher (Fontana & Frey, 2000). Structured interviews follow prescribed formats, focussing specifically on pre-determined

questions and are suited to surveys and opinion polls (Burns, 1998). In contrast, semi-structured and unstructured interviews often involve open-ended questioning, enabling the participant to propose their own answers and facilitating a deeper understanding of the phenomena being studied (Burns, 1998; Fontana & Frey, 2000). The immediacy of the interview process allows for instant clarification of comments made, minimising discrepancies and misinterpretation of data and reinforcing the descriptive validity of the study (Johnson & Christensen, 2004). In addition, interviews can be recorded and transcribed, then verified, as a form of triangulation (Grbich, 1999, p. 61), increasing the researchers' ability to be accurate and provide a clear picture of what individuals perceive to be true.

In educational research, face-to-face interviews have been employed to disclose in-depth information relating to teachers' professionalism, including their motivation, commitment, engagement and job satisfaction (Brunetti, 2001; Dinham, 1992b; Huberman, 1993; Joffres & Haughey, 2001; Robison, 2001; Shann, 1998). Such studies have been insightful and contributed to extending knowledge of the teaching profession. Interview findings have also provided the basis for further research, such as work done by Dinham relating to teachers' job satisfaction and occupational motivation (Dinham, 1992b, 1994; Dinham & Scott, 2002; Scott, Cox et al., 1999; Scott, Dinham et al., 1999; Scott et al., 2002).

This study has also chosen to adopt face-to-face interviews as part of the research methodology, as this form of research methodology is considered a reputable technique for data collection, providing in-depth, credible information relating to the topic under investigation (Fontana & Frey, 2000; Grbich, 1999). In particular, this study has chosen face-to-face, semi-structured interviews to disclose information relating to early childhood teachers' sustainment in the profession and in the classroom. Employed in both phases of data collection, a description of the interview formats and approaches used in this study is provided below.

Focus Groups

Group interviews, also known as focus groups (Fontana & Frey, 2000; Grbich, 1999; Krueger & Casey, 2000; Litosseliti, 2003), are one form of interview utilized in qualitative research investigations. Focus groups are generally regarded to

be small groups of people (four to twelve) brought together to “explore specific topics, and individuals’ views and experiences, through group interaction” (Litosseliti, 2003, p. 1).

Focus groups are considered appropriate research methodology where participants hold a common professional interest or background and meet collectively as a group to discuss issues relevant to their profession (Krueger & Casey, 2000). This methodological practice has been successfully employed to explore a range of ideas about a topic, to uncover factors that influence opinions and behaviour and to generate or test ideas (Krueger & Casey, 2000; Litosseliti, 2003). Focus groups may also provide a preliminary insight into a research topic, disclosing information that otherwise might not be revealed. Furthermore, focus groups are considered particularly suited to complementing other forms of research, such as surveys and case studies (Krueger & Casey, 2000; Litosseliti, 2003). There is, however, the potential for bias and difficulties in arranging meetings and analysing data collection (Litosseliti, 2003)

In recent years focus groups have gained increased attention as an appropriate qualitative methodology for educational research (Burnaford et al., 2001; Wellington, 2000). However, this study’s reviewed literature revealed little evidence of focus groups being employed in the past to investigate aspects related to teacher professionalism, retention or sustainment. Consequently, this study attempted to address this discrepancy.

This study adopted focus groups, in conjunction with open-ended question surveys, as part of the first phase of data collection. Using the same questions as in the surveys, focus groups were employed to gain a greater insight into key factors influencing early childhood teachers’ sustainment. Focus groups were considered suited to gathering additional information that otherwise might not have arisen from survey data collection (Litosseliti, 2003). Implementing focus groups was also deemed to be a means of ensuring that participants had a clear understanding of terminology used in the open-ended questions. Within each session participants were asked to verify their statements and provide an indication of common agreement (hands raised), to ensure clarity in collection and interpretation of

findings. In conducting four focus groups in the first phase of data collection this study sought to gather differing and shared perspectives of early childhood teachers' sustainment in the profession and in teaching.

Case Studies

Case studies have been used widely in qualitative research to provide a deep insight into a particular phenomena, exposing what is meaningful to not only to the researcher but also to the participant (Stake, 1997, 2000). Stake (2000, p.437) outlines three forms of case studies: intrinsic, conducted to gain a better understanding of a situation or person; instrumental, examining a particular issue or theory, and, collective, an instrumental study involving a number of individual cases. Case studies strive to provide a description of what, where, how, when and why phenomena occur, using narrative and testimony (Stake, 1997, p.403). Case studies place the particular phenomena or issue being studied in context, revealing how the topic is relevant to the participants and the impact on their lives.

While case studies themselves are not considered a form of data collection, they provide a means to present descriptive data gathered from different forms of observations, interviews and document analysis (Burns, 1998; Grbich, 1999; Stake, 1997). In educational research, case studies have been employed to illustrate issues related to teaching and highlight particular teachers' professional careers (Bell, 1995; Freeman & Zlotnik Schmidt, 2000; McClean, 1991; Stake, 2000; Wellington, 2000).

Although not widely applied in educational research, case studies have been used to understand unique issues related to teaching, particularly in the field of early childhood education (Fleet & Clyde, 1993; McClean, 1991; Yonemura, 1986). Case studies, in the form of a series of interviews, allow a rapport to develop between the researcher and each participant, enhancing interpretive validity (Johnson & Christensen, 2004, p. 251): the accurate interpretation of participant responses. Wellington (2000, p. 97) further reports that case studies are "insightful, attention holding and valuable" to the teaching profession as they enable readers to relate to what is reported.

This study has also chosen collective case studies to be part of the research methodology to gain a deeper insight on how teaching and life experiences impact on early childhood teachers' sustainment in the profession and in teaching. As the intent of qualitative research is to develop rich and thick descriptions of chosen phenomena (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p.10), conducting collective case studies is considered to be a methodological approach most suited to this investigation and makes a valid contribution to knowledge of teacher sustainment..

In compiling each case study, five semi-structured interviews were conducted with each of the six participating early childhood teachers. In these sessions participants recounted their teaching careers, educational beliefs and practices and perceptions of sustainment and answered the same open-ended questions as used in the first phase of data collection (for Interview Schedule, see Appendix F). In this study, case studies were considered suited to describing how key factors influence early childhood teachers' professional lives, providing a deep and meaningful insight into the complex nature of participating early childhood teachers' sustainment.

Reporting of Data

In addition to employing a range of qualitative methods to collate information, this study implemented quantitative measures to represent data gathered from the first phase of data collection. Although quantitative methods have traditionally been used to generalize and develop replicable findings (Wellington, 2000), in this study their inclusion held a different purpose. Recording the study's findings in tables, as percentages of the first phase participants, was perceived to contribute to the interpretation and discussion of the findings. In keeping with constructivist beliefs, these numerical representations were not considered to be transferable, generalizable (Drisko, 1997) or applicable to all early childhood teachers. Rather, employing such measures aided the disclosure of common knowledge of sustainment, as well as knowledge unique to individual early childhood teacher's sustainment.

Summary

The research methodology employed in this study was chosen on the basis that it would contribute to the development of deep and credible understandings of early childhood teachers' sustainment in the profession and in teaching. Descriptive surveys, focus groups and in-depth interviews, were the chosen qualitative methodology used to gather information pertaining to teacher sustainment. Quantitative representations of findings were employed to enhance clarity and interpretation of the findings from the first phase of data collection.

By employing more than one method of data collection, termed methods triangulation (Johnson & Christensen, 2004, p. 250), this investigation strove to verify and validate data collection and analysis, enhancing the credibility of the study. Using multiple forms of research methodology was also perceived to enhance the researcher's ability to place meanings in context, to develop a sense of consistency or confirmability in what was being reported and to reach a sense of completeness in data collection (Drisko, 1997, p.189-190). In this study the use of multiple forms of data collection was considered to contribute to the accurate portrayal of the nature of participating early childhood teachers' sustainment.

Research Design

A research design outlines the structure or plan to be followed in answering proposed research questions. The clarity of design contributes to the validity and reliability of the study's findings (Grbich, 1999).

This study sought to investigate factors relating to early childhood teachers' sustainment in the profession and in teaching. Data were gathered using a range of qualitative methods in an effort to obtain credible, confirmable in-depth accounts, relative to the participants' teaching and life experiences (Drisko, 1997). Chosen qualitative methodology included descriptive surveys, focus groups and six case studies compiled from a series of in-depth interviews, conducted over a 7 month period.

Descriptive surveys and focus groups were utilized to provide an overall view of the key factors early childhood teachers consider impact on their

sustainment in the profession and in teaching. Case studies were employed to develop a greater understanding of the chosen phenomena; teacher sustainment.

Research Procedure

The study involved two phases of data collection, the first being the distribution of descriptive open-ended question surveys (see Appendix E) to early childhood teachers working in two northern metropolitan Western Australian Department of Education and Training (DET) school districts and the participation of early childhood teachers in four focus group sessions. In the first phase of data collection all participants answered the same questions, recounting factors sustaining their professional commitment, job satisfaction, occupational motivation, effective teaching practice and ability to cope with daily demands of teaching and educational change. First phase participants also recounted teaching experiences, either positive or negative, that were significant to their sustainment.

The second phase of data collection involved case studies of six experienced early childhood teachers who had taught more than 20 years, and were still teaching in the classroom. In each case study, comprising of five in-depth interview sessions, participants recounted their teaching background and experiences, their pedagogical and daily practices and answered the same questions as used in the first phase of data collection (see Appendices E & F).

The Participants

Of the 227 early childhood teachers approached to participate in the first phase of data collection for this study 57 early childhood teachers, teaching kindergarten to year three level students in the two north metropolitan Western Australian DET school districts agreed to participate. Of those, 34 participants completed the surveys and 23 attended one of the four focus group sessions. Ranging in teaching experience from 2 to 30 years, and participating on a voluntary basis, participants were unfamiliar to the researcher, though focus group participants were known to each other, through working at the same schools.

In the second phase of data collection participants were purposefully selected, targeting teachers who had taught for a minimum of 20 years in early

childhood education, from kindergarten to year three level students, and had a reputation for effectiveness in their teaching practice. The decision to choose long-serving teachers held in high regard by their colleagues was based on the premise that sustainment is more than “survival”, but the ability to maintain productive engagement in teaching over an extended period of time.

From a pool of prospective participants recommended by three early childhood university lecturers and two Western Australian Department of Education and Training (DET) School District Office Curriculum Officers, eight early childhood teachers were originally approached to take part in this phase of the study, two declining due to work and personal commitments. Of the early childhood teachers who agreed to participate, two had achieved Senior Teacher Status and two had achieved Level 3 Teacher Status, promotional positions granted by DET to teachers with evidence of effective performance. The other two participating teachers indicated they had acted in temporary promotional positions during the course of their careers. In this study, six experienced early childhood teachers participated in the second phase of data collection.

A table illustrating the demographic outline of the participants involved in the two phases of data collection for the study can be found in Appendix G.

Ethics Clearance Process

Prior to the commencement of data collection permission was sought from significant gate keepers to conduct the investigation. First, clearance was sought from the Edith Cowan University Ethics Committee, outlining key components of the investigation and disclosing potential impacts on consenting participants. Upon approval, letters of introduction and disclosure were sent to district directors of two northern metropolitan Western Australian DET school districts, and the school principals of each contacted school (see Appendices A, B & D). An outline of the study was provided and permission sought to distribute the survey to the early childhood teachers and where applicable, to conduct focus groups sessions or case study interviews on the school grounds.

Data Collection

Phase One: Surveys and Focus Groups

Early childhood teachers were approached with letters of disclosure, open-ended question surveys and consent forms (see Appendices A, C & E), at six District Early Childhood Cluster Network Meetings and 16 government schools, of varying size, within the school districts. Early childhood teachers were invited to either complete the survey or attend one of four focus groups' meetings. To allow for reflection on their involvement, prospective participants were provided with stationery and postage to assist return of consent forms. Returned nondescript survey forms and consent forms were kept separate upon receipt by the researcher.

Upon receiving written consent, focus group candidates were notified of forthcoming focus group meetings, which took place over a period of 2 months at four different school locations, after the school day had concluded. At each focus group meeting the participants discussed the same questions as used in the survey forms (see Appendix E). Lasting approximately 40 minutes, focus group meetings were audio-taped, and later transcribed, as well as a written record kept of factors pertaining to teacher sustainment, arising from the discussions.

Phase Two: Case Studies

In the second phase of data collection, eight experienced early childhood teachers were individually approached to participate in a series of five interviews to compile individual case studies relating to their sustainment in teaching. Six early childhood teachers accepted the invitation, providing written consent and approval from themselves and their school principals. Case study participants were contacted separately to arrange suitable times and locations for interviews to take place.

Conducted over a 7 month period, each case study lasted up to 2 months, with two case studies running concurrently. Interview sessions were audio-taped and later transcribed, with identifying names and school locations removed to preserve confidentiality. Copies of the interview transcriptions were given to the participants for verification and validation, and returned to the researcher at their convenience. Any alterations and changes were duly noted.

Each interview session focussed on aspects relating to the participant's teaching experiences and practice (see Appendix F). In the final interview session participants verified a summary of factors relating to their sustainment, derived from analysis of transcripts from previous interviews, clarifying points they considered relevant to the study. Furthermore, participants were sent a summary of their sustaining factors and asked to rate each factor on a scale of 0 to 5 (least to most sustaining), and to identify those factors they considered most significant to their sustainment in teaching.

Case study participants were also invited to keep a journal of any thoughts or reflections relating to their teaching, coping strategies and reactions to significant incidences. Only one participant made notes, the remainder declined, finding that time constraints and personal commitments limited their ability to comply with this request. During the interview session the researcher kept notes of points arising from taped sessions and informal discussions, for clarification at subsequent interview sessions. The researcher also kept a record of contacts and reflective notes relating to the progress and direction of the study.

Collated data was treated with confidentiality, and only made available to the researcher, doctoral supervisors and relevant participants.

Data Analysis

In keeping with qualitative research practice, the survey forms and transcripts were individually analysed to identify key words or phrases that indicated the essence of teachers' experiences (Grbich, 1999, p. 170). For ease of comparison, all data derived from the research were collated under headings, based on traits of sustainment covered in the open-ended questions of the survey: professional commitment, job satisfaction, occupational motivation, effective teaching practice, coping with daily demands of teaching, coping with educational change and significant experiences impacting on sustainment in teaching.

To preserve anonymity, each participant's responses in the first phase of data collection were assigned an alphabetic letter and numeral according to which form of methodology they participated in (i.e. S for Survey; F for Focus Group). Key

words and themes were individually identified and listed under headings pertaining to each question.

Furthermore, common understandings were grouped together and collated in tables, indicating the number of survey participants and focus group participants sharing an understanding, and the percentage of the sample. These findings are discussed in chapter five, and compared to findings arising from the case studies and reviewed literature in chapter seven.

In the second phase of data collection, the first four interview transcripts for each participant were individually analysed to identify key words, comments and themes relating to the headings used in the first phase of data collection. Individual lists of potential factors affecting each participant's sustainment were compiled. In each participant's fifth interview session these factors were discussed more fully.

In addition, case study participants were asked to validate copies of interview transcripts and review a summary sheet, rating factors that impacted on their sustainment in teaching. Engaging the second phase participants in the analysis process was seen as a way of ensuring this study's findings were a true and accurate interpretation of these early childhood teachers' experiences and beliefs.

Limitations of the Study

Outlining the study's limitations contributes to strengthening the credibility of the investigation (Drisko, 1997). In this study several factors, including the participants, researcher and chosen methodology have the propensity to affect the trustworthiness, credibility, transferability and confirmability (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998) of the investigation's findings.

As this study is of a qualitative nature, involving a small number of early childhood teachers as part of its sample, the study's findings are limited and may not be truly representative of all early childhood teachers. Indeed, of the 227 early childhood teachers originally approached in the first phase of this study, only 57 responded, demonstrating a response rate of 25.3%.

This investigation is also limited by the quality and cooperation of its participants. This study relied on gaining access to early childhood teachers who are still committed to their profession, enthused about teaching and willing to participate in research. This study also relied on participants' integrity and truthful depiction of experiences and beliefs about teaching, including a willingness to admit to deficiencies in their teaching and how they overcame them.

A further limitation of this study is the selection process of participants for the second phase of data collection: the case studies. Choice of participants relied on others within the teaching profession, notably early childhood university lecturers and DET School District Curriculum Officers, to nominate experienced teachers they considered effective in their teaching practice. Owing to the subjective understanding of what a high quality teacher is, the chosen participants may not truly be representative of teaching excellence or effective teaching. However, due to the consideration that they had been teaching for an extended period of time and had achieved promotional positions within their profession it is feasible that these participants are competent teachers and have made valid contributions to this study.

Another major consideration, and potential limitation in this study, is the researcher's ability to accurately depict participants' thoughts and experiences. This study relied on the researcher developing an empathy with the participants, communicating effectively with them and identifying key, or critical, factors that sustain early childhood teachers in their teaching. Having been a teacher for nearly 25 years and worked in various early childhood settings, the researcher shared an understanding of the participants' teaching experiences, but was conscious not to distort their comments. To minimise misinterpretation case study participants were provided with several opportunities to verify and clarify their beliefs regarding sustainment. Case study participants were also given the opportunity to delete or change comments in their transcripts that might affect their anonymity or professional integrity.

The concern of any research is to provide valid, accurate information. As the methodology of this study involved the use of open-ended questions, it raised the possibility that terminology may be misunderstood. To overcome this possibility

first phase participants were given a brief explanation of chosen terminology. Case study participants were asked for their interpretation of key words, such as professional commitment, then their responses analysed accordance to their understandings, rather than those of the researcher.

This study relied on teachers reflecting on their experiences, beliefs and practices. According to constructivist beliefs, this study acknowledges that the act of reflection may lead to participants reconstructing their knowledge, leading to this research becoming action-based and contributing to a change in participants' beliefs or teaching practices. Three of the case study participants made comments that their involvement in this study had been an introspective and clarifying process, challenging them to take stock of their current teaching position and re-affirm their commitment to teaching. As the study was concerned with portraying the present realities for early childhood teachers teaching in the classroom, it is possible that for those teachers participating in the study their beliefs may have changed. Such is the nature of qualitative research and an inevitable part of the inquiry process.

As qualitative research has the potential to be subjective (Drisko, 1997; Wellington, 2000) attempts were made to maintain objectivity and minimize bias during this study's data collection and analysis process. Multiple forms of data collection, known as method triangulation, were employed to enhance the study's interpretive validity and internal validity (Johnson & Christensen, 2004, p. 251-254). Use of method triangulation also contributed to the study's credibility, confirmability and sense of completeness (Drisko, 1997). Furthermore, within the data collection process, ongoing clarification of participants' responses in focus groups and interview sessions attempted to minimize the occurrence of bias and enhance the study's reliability.

Research strives to provide valid and reliable knowledge of a particular phenomenon. This study has acknowledged potential limitations and made attempts to take these factors into consideration. In doing so, this study sought to develop credible and trustworthy findings that make a valid contribution to knowledge of teacher sustainment.

Ethical Considerations

The main ethical considerations of this study were concerned with protecting the rights of the participants. Participants were informed of the nature and purpose of this study. They were provided written documentation to support this, including a guarantee of confidentiality and anonymity in data collection and analysis.

Names and teaching locations of participants were changed on all data collected, with pseudonyms used in their place. Survey forms and focus groups transcripts were assigned numerals as a means of identification. Consent forms from all sources were kept separate to research data and only used to collate information regarding current teaching position and number of years teaching experience. Upon completion of analysis, collated information was stored in two boxes in different locations at the researcher's residence. To further preserve confidentiality the transcripts of interviews were only made available to the researcher, doctoral supervisors and respective case study participants.

Participants were given the right to withdraw from the study at any point of time prior to publication and were provided with opportunities to clarify their comments and ask questions about the research. The third case study participant, Gwen (pseudonym), requested not to have a fifth interview, due to work and personal commitments, but was willing to extend the fourth interview and include the transcripts and relevant data in the study.

Every effort was made to treat the participants of the study with courtesy and respect. All focus group sessions and interviews sessions were conducted at times and locations suited to the participants' work commitments and private life. Sessions only proceeded when the participants were agreeable and concluded upon their request. At all times during the data collection process the participants' comments and professional integrity were respected.

While this chapter examined the rationale for the chosen research methodology and outlined how the study was conducted, the next chapter describes the findings arising from the first phase of data collection, which involved surveys and focus group sessions.

CHAPTER FIVE: FINDINGS OF PHASE ONE

This chapter presents the findings from the first phase of the study, involving surveys and focus group sessions, outlining factors that impact on early childhood teachers' sustainment in their profession and in the classroom. Divided into eight sections, each section of this chapter relates to a question appearing in the survey forms: professional commitment to teaching, job satisfaction, occupational motivation, sustaining effective teaching practices, coping with the daily demands of teaching, coping with educational change, significant positive experiences impacting on sustainment and significant negative experiences impacting on sustainment.

The questions used in the first phase of data collection were based on traits discussed in the reviewed literature and associated with teacher sustainment, including professional commitment, job satisfaction, occupational motivation, effective teaching and coping with the demands of teaching and educational change. Participants were asked what factors contributed to their sustainment in each of the nominated traits (see Appendix E). To ensure a clear understanding of each question, participants in this phase of the study were given a brief description of the terminology used. In this study, professional commitment refers to teachers' willingness to fulfil teaching responsibilities and duties, job satisfaction refers to enjoyment of teaching and occupational motivation refers to continued interest and retention in teaching. Sustaining effective teaching practices relates to developing and maintaining pedagogical knowledge and implementation in the classroom. The daily demands of teaching refers to duties, either directly or indirectly associated to teaching, while educational change refers to the changing roles of teachers and changes to policy and practice imposed from sources outside the immediate classroom, such as those being made to curriculum.

Included in each section of this chapter, are examples of participants' comments, along with identification of the source in which they appear (labelled F1 to F4 for focus groups and S1 to S34 for surveys). Tables illustrating the range and commonality of survey and focus group participants' responses are also provided.

Participants involved in the survey provided several responses to each question, giving a rich and varied range of data. In each focus group session several responses for each comment were also made. However, not all focus group participants offered comments. At the end of each session, the researcher repeated each question and the stated comments. Participants displayed a show of hands to demonstrate whether they agreed with the comment, or had shared similar experiences. A count for each comment was taken, to identify the degree of common understanding held by participants in the focus group.

Responses pertaining to each question were then collated and key words highlighted, then grouped together to indicate common themes. Data from the focus groups and surveys was kept separate, but analysed using the same process. Key words and themes for each question were then tallied and compiled in table formats (as follows), to show the total of focus group responses and total of survey responses, then the percentage of the participants in the first phase of data collection. The intent of this process was to illustrate significant common understandings, not to generalise the findings.

The number of participants involved in data collection was limited by their willingness to participate. Of the 227 early childhood teachers approached, 23 teachers participated in one of the four focus group sessions and 34 teachers completed the survey. In total, 57 participants took part in the first phase of data collection, a response rate of 25.3%.

Participants varied in teaching experience, from 2 years to over 30 years, and worked in a range of educational settings, most teaching either kindergarten (K) or pre-primary (P) students. Thirteen participants had taught more than 20 years: eight took part in the focus group sessions (F3 and F4), and five completed the surveys (S30 to 34). Only two of the 57 participants were male, both responding to the survey. A table outlining the demographics of the participants is provided in Appendix G.

The following sections describe the responses made by survey and focus group participants in answering the questions as presented in the survey.

Professional Commitment of Early Childhood Teachers

When asked about what contributed to their sustainment of professional commitment, the majority of participants (80.7%) identified students are a major factor. Several participants commented on their "love of the children" (S7, S8, S12, S15, S22, S23, S26, S29, S32). Others referred to specific characteristics attributed to their students, such as "innocence" (S20), "spontaneity" (S33, F4), "excitement towards learning experiences" (S2, S9) and "enjoyment of coming to school" (S17, S27). Survey participants also revealed their commitment developed from being their students' "first teachers" (S6, S33), "laying the foundations" and "building blocks" for students' later learning (S3, S21). Focus group participants indicated they sustained professional commitment through working specifically with "young children" (F2, F3, F4) and enjoying their "honesty and truthfulness" (F1).

Table 1.

Professional Commitment of Early Childhood Teachers

Factors Affecting	Focus Group	Survey	Total	**% Sample**
The Students	18	28	46	**80.7**
Children's Development	11	15	26	**45.6**
Colleagues & Collaboration	10	9	19	**33.3**
Flexibility & Autonomy	7	11	18	**31.6**
Making a Difference	-	18	18	**31.6**
Parents	2	9	11	**19.3**
Belief in Early Childhood Pedagogy	3	9	9	**15.8**
Extended Role Beyond Teaching	3	5	8	**14.0**
Rewarding & Challenging	1	4	5	**8.8**
Qualifications & Wanting a Job	4	-	4	**7.0**
Availability of Resources	-	3	3	**5.3**

Note. N= 57 participants in total; 23 Focus Group participants + 34 Survey participants

Comments were also made regarding observation of students' learning, achievements, development and growth (45.6%). Observing students' development provided visual evidence of participants' teaching efforts and reinforced their commitment to early childhood education. As one survey participant (S9) stated: "I enjoy seeing the improvement made by younger children and the excitement they demonstrate when they make a new discovery."

In addition, work colleagues impacted on participants' professional commitment (33.3%). These teachers benefited from developing relationships and working closely with their colleagues, including education assistants and same year-level teachers. Survey participants revealed through "being part of a group of early childhood educators" (S1), "part of a team" (S6, S19) and developing "collaborative planning" (S16) professional commitment was sustained. Similarly, participants in the third focus group (F3), all working at the same school, benefited from "being with like-minded colleagues and collaborating together."

The flexibility and autonomy afforded by working in early childhood settings also sustained participants' professional commitment (31.6%). Participants valued being able to teach according to their own beliefs and having flexibility in their planning and practice. As one survey participant wrote:

> There is more freedom in K and P (kindergarten and pre-primary) than other year levels as we don't have to go to specialist teachers. If an activity is really going well we can keep going and change other things in the program, including recess. This also works in reverse, we can finish something that is not working. (S4).

Focus group participants also indicated they benefited from having the "flexibility to try different things" (F2) or implement a "flexible timetable," conducting indoor-outdoor activities and painting tasks when "you felt like it" (F4).

Altruistic belief in the value of early childhood education was mentioned by survey participants (31.6%), but not by focus group participants. Survey participants nominated "making a difference" (S2, S13, S15, S24, S26, S27) as a factor sustaining their professional commitment. Related comments included "knowing I can have a positive effect" (S1), "I believe I can make a valuable contribution"

(S22) and “I believe in the work I do (S25), indicative of altruistic beliefs and self-efficacy sustaining these early childhood teachers’ commitment to teaching.

Belief in early childhood pedagogy also sustained participants’ professional commitment (15.8%). The second focus group participants (F2) referred to their use of a “hands on approach” and developmentally appropriate practice as sustaining factors. Two survey participants also noted that the provision of early intervention, a practice specifically implemented in early childhood education for students with learning difficulties, contributed to sustaining their professional commitment (S14, S24).

Working with parents was another factor commented on by participants (19.3%). While 2 survey participants referred to working with parents for the children’s benefit (S2, S11), others valued “support from parents” (S4, S9, S11). Several participants also elaborated on their role of providing assistance and support to parents and families (S1, S19, S23). In the fourth focus group session (F4) one participant expanded on this point:

> I prefer contact with the whole family. Other teachers in the upper grades don’t seem to see the value in it. And I also find, we seem these days (sic), having come through quite a lot of young mothers, who don’t seem to know what to do. Being an older teacher, who has brought up children myself, I have a lot to offer…I’m a counsellor and mentor, giving them advice. (F4).

Other factors sustaining participants’ professional commitment included possessing internationally-recognised qualifications (7.0%), which enabled participants to travel (F2) or find a job (F3, F4). Several participants (8.8%) made general comments that the challenges and rewards associated with early childhood teaching were sustaining factors, while others (5.3%) nominated “concrete resources used to enhancing students’ learning” (S14).

These varied responses indicate that a range of factors, both shared and unique, impact on early childhood teachers’ professional commitment. Key factors include participants’ students, work colleagues, altruistic beliefs and the ability to work in a flexible and autonomous work environment. Parents, early childhood

educational beliefs and roles beyond teaching also contribute to sustaining these early childhood teachers' commitment to their profession.

Job Satisfaction of Early Childhood Teachers

When asked about what factors sustain their job satisfaction the majority of participants in this phase of the study (73.7%) revealed that their relationships with work colleagues were a key factor. In the focus groups participants revealed "working with a team of people" (F2) and "working together" (F3, F4) contributed to a supportive work environment, making their work satisfying. Several survey participants (S17, S21, S24, S27, S29, S31, S33) referred to working alongside staff, such as education assistants. Others (S2, S3, S6, S10, S30) valued the support of their peer group, teachers sharing the same beliefs and philosophies. Comments relating to collegiality and job satisfaction included "I don't feel isolated" (F3, S9), "I value lots of sharing of ideas and communication" (S14) and "the staff that I'm working with are positive, friendly and caring, making it enjoyable to come to work" (S31).

Students also contributed to participants' job satisfaction (61.4%). Survey participants benefited from observing children "grow and develop" (S1, S3, S4, S10, S12, S15, S17, S19, S23, S25) and "enjoying their learning experiences" (S4, S6, S30). Job satisfaction was sustained through observing students' "enthusiasm" (S10, S22), "naivety and humour" (S9, S20), "self-motivation to learn" (S7, S34) and propensity to be happy (S13, S18). In the focus groups, participants gained job satisfaction from "contact with children" (F1), "being part of children's social group" (F2) and "seeing delight on children's faces" (F4).

Autonomy of practice was again mentioned by participants (26.3%), this time as sustaining job satisfaction. Focus group participants commented on the ability to "use creativity of mind" (F1) and cater for change, as "every day varies, and years are always different" (F4). The "love of new ideas" (S5) and the "challenges of having new children each year" (S33) proved rewarding for some, while others enjoyed "being in charge of their own decisions" (S20) and having "freedom and flexibility" in learning experiences (S6, S26, S28).

Table 2.

Job Satisfaction of Early Childhood Teachers

Factors Affecting	Focus Group	Survey	Total	% Sample
Colleagues	21	21	42	73.7
The Students	9	26	35	61.4
Autonomy and Change	9	6	15	26.3
Parents	-	13	13	22.8
Administration	4	7	11	19.3
School Culture	5	5	10	17.5
Work conditions	2	8	10	17.5
Making a Difference	1	9	10	17.5
Self- Efficacy	2	5	7	12.3
Availability of Resources	-	3	3	5.3

Note: N= 57 participants; 23 Focus Group participants + 34 Survey participants.

Parents also impacted on participants' job satisfaction (22.8%), particularly when parents were "appreciative, supportive, helpful and respectful" (S6) and gave "positive feedback" (S2). For some participants, parents become their friends (S8) or were a source of social interaction (S33), while others were sustained by developing a good working relationship with parents (S12, S30).

The school culture, or tone (17.5%), impacted on job satisfaction, where "feeling part of a team" (S10), working in a "positive, friendly communicative school environment (S3) or in an environment where you were "not frightened to share" (F3) proved rewarding. Furthermore, the support and leadership given by the school administrators (19.3%) also contributed to participants' job satisfaction. Several participants enjoyed being "valued" or "praised" by their principals (F1, F2, S4, S12), a professional recognition of their teaching efforts.

More pragmatically, participants (17.5%) sustained job satisfaction through their work conditions, in particular the work hours (S8, S11, S20, S22, S23) and school holidays (S8, S11, S20, S22, S23, S25, S27). In the fourth focus group (F4), participants expanded on this point, explaining that teaching was a source of income and the hours conducive to meeting the demands of family commitments.

In addition, the physical work environment and availability of teaching resources contributed to participants' job satisfaction (5.3%), with one participant enjoying working in a "large classroom, with bright and clean facilities" (S31) and others valuing access to quality resources and practical support (S28, S29).

The ability to "make a difference" (S14, S15, S16, S26), was again mentioned (17.5%), this time as sustaining participants' job satisfaction. These teachers considered early childhood teaching to be of social value, having a positive impact on children's lives. Associated with this altruistic belief, were participants' comments regarding their self-efficacy (12.3%), where "feeling competent at my job" (S10), being a "good communicator" (S16) and having "the opportunity to be a role model" (F1, S12) gave participants the satisfaction of using their knowledge and skills in a worthwhile profession.

The responses to this section indicate, once again, that several factors impact on sustaining early childhood teachers' job satisfaction. For participants in this phase of the study, work colleagues and students were a major influence, as well as autonomy of practice, parents and school administrators, the school culture, conditions of employment, teachers' self-efficacy and the altruistic belief in their ability to make a difference to students' lives.

Occupational Motivation of Early Childhood Teachers

When asked what sustained their occupational motivation participants (47.4%) indicated that the work conditions related to teaching, including income, work hours and school holidays, were key factors. In particular, 18 participants referred to their need to remain in teaching due to financial circumstances (S2, S3, S4, S6, S11, S13, S16, S20, S22, S23, S24, F1, F2, F4). Participants in the fourth focus group (F4) reiterated that teachers' work conditions suited their family

commitments and met their basic needs, providing a strong incentive for their continuance in teaching.

Autonomy and the challenge of change also sustained participants' occupational motivation (42.1%). In the third focus group (F3) participants revealed that early childhood teaching was typified by flexibility in practice and a lack of repetition, with the sharing of new ideas and a degree of autonomy and choice. These comments were shared by other participants, both in focus groups (F1, F2) and in survey responses (S4, S6, S12, S18, S20, S30). As one survey participant stated:

> Each year is different, with different challenges. Children are different as are class dynamics… Having done various other jobs I can say teaching is never boring: each day, week, year is different. (S4).

Likewise, teaching different year levels (S5, S25, S26) and in different locations (S21, S25, S33), or assuming different teaching roles (S9, S14, S29, S30) also sustained participants' occupational motivation.

Students and teaching colleagues continued to influence participants' sustainment, this time in relation to occupational motivation. Survey participants (35.1%) either made reference to "the children" (S6, S7, S10, S11, S12, S15, S26, S27, S29, S32), or the "children's progress and development" (S2, S8, S18, S19) as sustaining occupational motivation. Survey participants (29.8%) also nominated the opportunity to "work with peers" (S6, S13, S15) or to "work with other people" (S23, S31, S32) and receive "support" from their colleagues and school administrators (S12, S19, S30) as sustaining their occupational motivation. In contrast, focus group participants did not refer to these factors as sustaining their occupational motivation.

Self-efficacy and intrinsic motivation were also perceived to be sustaining factors (35.1%). Comments included "I like to do a job to the best of my ability" (S5), "I'm good at what I do" (S28) and "I feel I am successful and can make a difference in many young lives, however small" (S23). Two participants specifically stated that they were "self-motivated" (S14, S21), while others indicated that "teaching is what you are trained for" (F4, S3, S13). In the fourth focus group (F4)

participants explained that this belief empowered them to feel secure and confident in what they were doing, motivating them to stay in the teaching profession.

Table 3.

Occupational Motivation of Early Childhood Teachers

Factors Affecting	Focus Group	Survey	Total	**% Sample**
Work conditions (Holidays/hours/finance)	16 (6/3/7)	11 (3/1/11)	27	**47.4**
Autonomy and Change	8	16	24	**42.1**
The Students	-	20	20	**35.1**
Self Efficacy & Intrinsic Motivation	5	15	20	**35.1**
Colleagues	-	17	17	**29.8**
Parents	3	8	11	**19.3**
Job Satisfaction	1	7	8	**14.0**
Professional Development	-	7	7	**12.3**
Comparison to other jobs	-	4	4	**7.0**
Administrative Leadership	3	-	3	**5.3**
Family support	-	2	2	**3.5**

Note: N=57 participants; 23 Focus Group participants + 34 Survey participants.

Furthermore, parents influenced participants' occupational motivation (19.3%), through having realistic expectations (S12), engaging in positive interactions (S15, S30) and providing positive feedback (S1, S22, S25). Comments included receiving "support" from children's families (S11, S31) and "being respected as a professional" by parents, and within the community (F1, S17).

Participating in professional development (PD) sessions further sustained occupational motivation (12.3%), with one survey participant stating "I am continuing to grow and learn" (S10), indicating that ongoing-learning maintained

motivation. Another enjoyed the benefits of informal professional development, gaining new ideas from having pre-service students in her class (S27).

Other factors were also nominated. Several participants (14.0%) found job satisfaction, their “love” and “enjoyment” of teaching (S13, S24, S27, S33) and “being happy to go to work” (S31) contributed to sustaining occupational motivation. Administrative leadership (5.3%) was also commented on, with participants in the third focus group (F3) benefiting from having a principal who understood and promoted early childhood educational practices. Others were able to compare teaching to having worked in other jobs (7%) and found they were more motivated in their current profession (S4, S9, S29, S30). Two participants also maintained their motivation through the support and encouragement they received from their spouse (S19) and family (S30).

Several factors, both shared and unique, sustained this study’s participants’ occupational motivation. Common factors included teachers’ conditions of employment, autonomy and change, self-efficacy and self-motivation, work colleagues, parents and students. Mention was also made of job satisfaction, professional development, comparison to other jobs and family support.

Effective Teaching Practices of Early Childhood Teachers

When commenting on sustainment of effective teaching practice participants (71.9%) indicated that teaching colleagues were an important factor. Professional peers acted as a “support” (S12), became “mentors” (S14, S30), or a “learning resource “(S25). Talking to other early childhood teachers (S29) and engaging in collegial discussions (S22) enabled these participants to share new ideas and initiatives. Particular mention was made of “networking” (S11, S12, S14, S15, S31, S33), attending meetings where participants exchanged ideas with other early childhood teachers. Working in collaboration with other teachers, such as in “tandem teaching” (S1, S8) or in a “team approach” (S26), allowed participants to observe different pedagogical approaches in operation, “to share ideas” (F3) and modify their own teaching practice.

Intrinsic motivation, the desire to improve teaching pedagogy (54.4%), also arose as a sustaining factor. Comments included “a belief that I can do things better” (S30), having a “positive attitude” (S31) or “a desire to provide the best learning environment that I can” (S24) and making “a commitment to not remaining the same each year” (S32). Participants in the fourth focus group (F4) also revealed that self-reflection, being prepared to think about their teaching pedagogy, contributed to their sustainment of effective teaching practice in the classroom.

Table 4.

Effective Teaching Practices of Early Childhood Teachers

Factors Affecting	Focus Group	Survey	Total	**% Survey**
Colleagues & Networking	21	20	41	**71.9**
Intrinsic Motivation & Reflection	13	18	31	**54.4**
Professional Development	15	15	30	**52.6**
The Students	3	11	14	**24.6**
Written Resources	2	8	10	**17.5**
Keep up with Change	-	8	8	**14.0**
School Administration	3	5	8	**14.0**
Learning Through Doing	4	1	5	**8.8**
Mentoring Pre-Service Students	-	4	4	**7.0**
Maintain Employment	-	1	1	**1.7**

Note. N= 57 participants in total; 23 focus Group participants + 34 Survey participants.

Furthermore, professional development sessions provided participants (52.6%) with ideas and strategies to develop and sustain their teaching practice. Some participants specified they valued only “appropriate” (S16, F3) and “relevant” (S3, S27) professional development, with 2 participants referring to particular professional development sessions, “the changes in education and the need to keep up” (S13) and “PD workshops on co-operative work practices” (S25) as impacting on their teaching practice

Once again, students (24.6%) were referred to as a sustaining factor. Typical comments included “maintaining a focus on where our interests should lie: the kids” (S32) and “reflecting on the needs of the children” (S18), indicating that these early childhood teachers implement and sustain effective teaching practices to meet the needs of their students.

Participants (17.5%) also revealed that they accessed written resources, including journals, books, newspapers and the Internet, to sustain their teaching expertise. Professional reading kept these teachers informed of current research and effective early childhood teaching pedagogy. Several participants (14%) also alluded to “keeping up with change” but failed to describe how they achieved this.

School administrators were also influential in participants (14%) sustaining effective teaching practices, providing “leadership” (S9, S26), “encouragement” (S19), and “support” (S12, F1). Receiving constructive feedback from the school principal (F4) and attending Performance Management meetings (S13), semi-formal sessions with line managers regarding teacher performance and development, also contributed to sustaining participants’ effective teaching practice.

Less common factors were also nominated, including developing effective practice through the act of teaching (8.8%), gaining new ideas from having pre-service teachers in the classroom (7%), and “knowing I have to keep improving to ensure I remain employed” (S20).

Early childhood teachers in this phase of the study indicated teaching colleagues were the main factor sustaining their effective teaching practice in the classroom. Engaging in self-motivation and reflection, attending professional development sessions and meeting the needs of their students were common approaches taken by participants in this study. Others were sustained through educational reading, keeping up with change, the support of their school administrators and the act of teaching. These findings indicate a variety of approaches contribute to this study’s participants sustaining their effectiveness as teachers.

Early Childhood Teachers Coping with the Daily Demands of Teaching

When asked what contributed to their coping with the daily demands of teaching participants (63.1%) indicated that work colleagues were once again a key factor in their sustainment. Talking to other teachers (S13, S14, S21, S24, S31), seeking advice and assistance (S17), sharing problems (S31) and "venting" (S9) were some of the strategies participants employed. Several participants valued the work and support of their education assistants (S8, S34, F1). One survey participant benefited from having a mentor (S28), whilst others enjoyed social engagement with peers (S24, F3) and developing friendships (F4). Participants in the fourth focus group (F4) recounted how they enjoyed socializing with their peers at the end of the school day, "Friday night drinks" and sharing problems, finding "you can always talk to someone and get advice."

Table 5.

Early Childhood Teachers Coping with Daily Demands of Teaching

Factors Affecting	Focus Group	Survey	Total	**% Sample**
Work Colleagues	17	19	36	**63.1**
Sense of Humour	9	10	19	**33.3**
Health (Sleep, Diet & Exercise)	6 (5/ 0/ 1)	13 (3/ 3/ 7)	19	**33.3**
Being Organised	2	14	16	**28.1**
Realistic Expectations	3	13	16	**28.1**
Private Life	6	8	14	**24.6**
Prioritise & Be Flexible	-	10	10	**17.5**
Time Management	-	10	10	**17.5**
Personality & Values	3	2	5	**8.8**
Holidays	3	2	5	**8.8**
Involve Parents	3	1	4	**7.0**

Note. N= 57 participants in total; 23 Focus Group participants + 34 Survey participants.

Furthermore, maintaining a sense of humour and having fun with students facilitated participants (33.3%) sustaining their daily practice. A sense of humour was specifically mentioned by 12 participants (S1, S6, S14, S15, S23, S29, F2, F3, F4), while others wrote of “having fun” and “receiving enjoyment from the children” (S11, S20, S26, S28, S30, S33). Other attributes relating to participants’ dispositions and values (8.8%) were also alluded to, including being “friendly” (S10), displaying “patience” (S34), staying “calm and a good listener, valuing individuals” (S26) and having a sense of “spirituality” (F1).

Health-related practices also impacted on participants’ (33.3%) abilities to cope. Keeping healthy and eating well (S1, S8, S33), having sufficient sleep (S8, S11, S13, S23, F3) and engaging in some form of exercise, including walking (S33, S22) and sporting activities (S18, S21) contributed to daily sustainment.

Being organised, having a clear understanding of teaching objectives, and achieving them, were also commented on by several participants (28.1%). “Thorough planning and preparation” (S6, S14, S33) and “staying as organised as possible” (S27, S28, F1) were indicative of participants’ comments. Particular strategies employed included “using a diary” (S27), developing a programming timetable that “mixed types of lessons” (S25) and “write everything down and plan an overview of the term, putting together as many ideas early, then fine tuning each week” (S3).

Participants’ private life, including family and social life (24.6%), also affected participants’ ability to cope. Several participants indicated it was the support of their family (S17, S23), or their family life (S21), that sustained their daily teaching. Comments were made regarding “having a life outside of teaching” (S15, F3) and being able to “switch off” (S11). Talking with family and friends (S13, S24) gave these participants an opportunity to relax and disassociate from the demands of their work and to maintain a life-work balance.

Having realistic expectations of personal capabilities (28.1%) also proved to be a sustaining factor for this study’s participants. Aware of their emotional health

and the need to pace themselves, participants' comments included, "knowing when to say no" (S16, S27), "knowing when to slow down and accepting that it is okay to chill-out with the kids" (S14), "try to be realistic in terms of taking on extra work at school" (S22) and "realising that it is a never ending job and I can only do so much. I can't rescue or fix everything" (S23). Several participants also found through focussing on their students (S6, S7, S11, S20, S32), they were able to rationalise their workload and be realistic in what they could achieve. As one participant (S7) stated, "If I'm feeling uptight I chat with the kids. They always bring everything back into perspective."

Similarly, prioritizing and being flexible in teaching practice (17.5%) also contributed to participants' daily sustainment. Comments included "leave what has been planned and do something less taxing" (S9), "focus on the greatest need" (S30) and "we can't always do big things but we can do small things in a big way, one step at a time" (S19). Participants in the second focus group (F2) also valued being flexible in their practice, changing activities if they weren't working, or if children were inattentive.

Time management practices were also mentioned by survey participants (17.5%), including getting to school early (S13, S18) and taking work home (S22). One survey participant stated "I need to work at home on the weekend and occasionally need a day just to catch up" (S5). Others had learnt to "take time out for themselves" (S9, S12, S21), including reducing their teaching workload and working part-time (S10, S24). In addition, several participants (8.8%) found the school holidays to be beneficial, while others sought support from parents (7%) and involved them in their teaching program.

Participants indicated they employed a range of strategies to cope with the daily demands associated to teaching. Once again work colleagues proved significant to sustainment. Other factors were also relevant, including participants' sense of humour, health and wellbeing. Participating early childhood teachers also indicated that through being organised, flexible, self-aware and realistic they were able to maintain a life-work balance and be sustained in their teaching practice.

Early Childhood Teachers Coping with Educational Change

When commenting on educational change participants (45.6%) indicated that their attitudes contributed to their ability to cope with educational change. Comments were made relating to the "inevitability" (S1, S30) of educational change and having a "positive attitude" (S26, S28, S29. F1). A common comment, "have a go" (S16, S22, S23, S32, F2, F3, F4), indicated that participants' willingness to accept and adopt educational change facilitated their coping with the implementation of educational change.

Table 6.

Early Childhood Teachers Coping with Educational Change

Factors Affecting	Focus Group	Survey	Total	**% Survey**
Positive Attitude- Have a Go	13	13	26	**45.6**
Professional Colleagues	9	12	21	**36.8**
Rationalise & Be Selective	-	15	15	**26.3**
Professional Development	3	11	14	**24.5**
Adapt Implementation	-	10	10	**17.5**
Seek Information & Help	1	8	9	**15.8**
School Administration	2	4	6	**10.5**
Avoidance	3	-	3	**5.3**
Early Involvement	-	2	2	**3.5**
Be Organised	1	-	1	**1.7**

Note. N= 57 participants in total; 23 Focus Group participants + 34 Survey participants

Professional colleagues were a major support for participants (36.8%) during the change process. Talking (S4, S8, S11, S24, S29) and networking with fellow early childhood teachers (S12, S31), as well as working collaboratively (S15, F2, F3) enabled participants to share ideas and develop a common understanding of proposed changes. As participants in the fourth focus group (F4) stated "change was easier when collaboration was involved." Two survey participants indicated they

“seek out experts in the educational field” (S18) or have “curriculum leaders update us” (S26), preferring to access advice from informed professional colleagues, but overall it was communication within the profession that sustained these early childhood teachers during the change process.

Rationalising changes and being selective in their implementation was an approach employed by several participants (26.3%). Comments included “being realistic” (S30, S31), “adjusting it to what works and is sensible and appropriate” (S1) and “sometimes evaluate the change being made and take from it what I deem to be useful” (S4). Needing to know what the changes involved also featured in one participant’s comments, “make changes only when you understand what it is you are trying to achieve” (S6). In contrast, another coped by “sometimes saying no” (S16). These teachers used their professional judgement to determine what would be beneficial to their students (S32) and what was within their own capabilities.

Another approach adopted by this study’s participants (17.5%), was to adapt the implementation of educational change. Several participants indicated they implemented changes in a “step-by-step fashion” (S25), attempting small changes (S3, S6, S23) or implementing one change at a time (S13). Others altered the pace of implementation, “taking things slowly” (S7, S10, S24) or at their “own pace” (S14, S27). Participants’ self-awareness and professional judgement determined the approach taken to implementing educational changes in their daily practice.

Other factors related to coping with educational change included accessing professional development (24.5%) and seeking information and assistance (15.8%). Participants engaged in professional reading (S3, S11, S20, S28, S29), asking for help (S3, S25, S27, S28) or brainstorming (F3). School administrators (10.5%) were also influential, providing leadership and direction to certain participants (S22, S34, F1).

Although 3 participants in the fourth focus group (F4) admitted they tried to avoid change, putting their “heads in the sand”, they acknowledged the inevitability of change. Alternatively, 2 survey participants (S21, S30) enjoyed being involved early in the change process, engaging in action research or attending steering

committees. One participant in the fourth focus group (F4) also commented that she benefited from being organised, but did not elaborate on this point.

Having a positive attitude, accessing information, and engaging in professional dialogue with professional colleagues were common factors sustaining by this study's participants during the implementation of educational change. These early childhood teachers also indicated they used a combination of approaches, including rationalising, prioritizing and adapting proposed changes, varying the scope and pace of implementation according to their own abilities and beliefs, to remain sustained throughout the change process.

Early Childhood Teachers' Critical Experiences in Sustainment

Participants' recounts of experiences impacting on sustainment in teaching varied considerably. Not all participants recounted an experience (14.0%), and, rather than relating a specific incident, several participants made general comments, such as attention to self-growth (S5), parent feedback (S29) and team teaching and planning (S32). Others did not identify an experience as being positive or negative, particularly when relating experiences which involved teaching specific children. An interpretation was made, that if the participant recounted progress in the child's development, or received positive feedback from others, then the experience was positive. If, however, comments were made about lack of achievement then the experience was negative.

As indicated in the opening paragraphs of this chapter, not all focus group participants spoke of their experiences, though several participants nodded in agreement when incidents were recounted, indicating they had also undergone similar experiences. In responding to the survey six participants recounted both a positive and negative incident, and four participants did not complete this section.

Positive Experiences in Sustainment

Participants indicated that a range of positive experiences reinforced their sustainability in teaching. A total of 33 participants, 22 from the survey and 11 from the focus group sessions, provided comments regarding positive teaching experiences impacting on their sustainability in the profession.

Experiences involving students' growth and development were recounted by several participants (24.5%). One survey participant was sustained in her teaching through "hearing children who struggle tell me they're focussed and climbing the learning ladder and never give up" (S28). Several participants (S8, S19, S22, S23) indicated it was the progress made by a particular child, rather than a group of students, that sustained their teaching practice. Rather than referring to academic achievements, these teachers commented on other areas of development, including improving a child's speech (S3, S22), changing a child's behaviour (S8, S11, S31), including a child with special needs (S4, S33) and making a child feel confident and happy (S19, S23).

Table 7.

Early Childhood Teachers' Positive Experiences of Sustainment

Experiences involving	Focus Group	Survey	Total	**% Sample**
Students	1	13	14	**24.6**
Parents	3	7	10	**17.5**
Change in Occupation	4	3	7	**12.3**
Collaboration with Colleagues	2	2	4	**7.0**
Recognition	1	2	3	**5.3**
Personal Self-Growth	-	2	2	**3.5**
Pre-service Students	-	1	1	**1.7**
Collaboration with Support Agency	-	1	1	**1.7**

Note. N = 57 Participants; 23 Focus Group + 34 Survey participants.

Parents also featured in participants' positive experiences (17.5%), where receiving positive comments from parents and being appreciated for their teaching efforts (S4, S21, S28, S29, S34) enhanced professional sustainment. A participant in the second focus group (F2) remained friends with parents of her students. Other

participants had been nominated by parents for teaching awards (F1, S13), or had received letters of acknowledgement (S18).

Having a change in occupation or a break from teaching (12.3%) also contributed to participants' sustainment. Those who had undertaken a change in teaching practice, either through taking leave to become a parent (F3), teaching overseas (S25) or changing from teaching primary-aged students to pre-primary students (S24) found the experience strengthened their professional commitment and rejuvenated their occupational motivation.

Teaching colleagues also figured in participants' positive experiences (7%), with participants benefiting from receiving support from colleagues during their practice of teaching (S15, S16). A survey participant (S16) found this experience "made all the difference, allowing me to have the confidence in tackling all issues." Likewise, the support of an outside agency sustained another participant while teaching a student with special needs (S3).

Other less common experiences were also recounted. While two participants valued the recognition they received from school administrators for the work they do (F3, S6), another received affirmation from reading articles on the importance of early childhood education (S1). Two participants recounted that their quest for personal self-growth, and self-belief in their competence, attributed to their sustainment in teaching (S5, S6), while another was sustained by mentoring pre-service teachers and receiving positive responses from her students (S28).

Recounts of positive experiences indicate that observing students' progress, experiencing support from within the profession from both teaching colleagues and line managers, and receiving acknowledgement by parents are factors contributing to participants' sustainment in teaching. Experiences involving a change in occupation, support from outside the profession and personal self-growth also impacted on individual participants' sustainment in their profession.

Negative Experiences in Sustainment

Once again participants recounted a range of experiences, though negative, as influencing their sustainment in teaching. A total of 23 participants, 13 from the surveys and 10 from the focus groups, participated in this section of the data collection.

Several participants (15.8%) related experiences involving teaching a specific child and encountering difficulties, particularly in terms of student behaviour (S31) or lack of administrative support (S33). A survey participant revealed that through maintaining high expectations and implementing a range of strategies, she had “stuck to my guns” and continued to teach a difficult class (S9). Similar comments were made in the fourth focus group (F4), disclosing that through focussing on “small improvements” participants were able to persevere in teaching individual students with behavioural or psychological problems.

Table 8.

Early Childhood Teachers’ Negative Experiences of Sustainment

Experiences Involving	Focus Group	Survey	Total	**% Survey**
Challenging Students	5	4	9	**15.8**
Employment Difficulties	4	1	5	**8.8**
Conflict with Colleagues	1	4	5	**8.8**
School Administration	-	4	4	**7.0**
Conflict with Parents	1	3	4	**7.0**
Educational Change	-	1	1	**1.7**

Note. N= 57 participants in total; 23 Focus Group participants + 34 Survey participants.

Difficulties relating to employment were also discussed in the fourth focus group (F4) where several participants (8.8%) had experienced difficulties attaining a teaching position, having come from another country or moved interstate. Mention was also made of returning to the workforce after a lapse in employment through raising their own children. These participants (F4) found they had “to fight to get back into the system.” A survey participant (S20) also recounted an experience of

trying to get into a merit select school and encountering difficulties. During this experience the participant met a person who gave sound advice and developed her reflective thinking practices, a strategy that has since contributed to her sustainment in teaching.

Relationships with teaching colleagues also proved negative experiences for some participants (8.8%). A participant in the first focus group (F1) recounted that a teaching colleague “saw me as a threat as I represented change, “ but was sustained by adhering to her educational beliefs. Others also related incidences where their teaching styles or professionalism were compared to their colleagues’ (S21, S30). This experience lead a survey participant to question her own practice, become involved in various early childhood groups and strengthen her commitment to the profession (S30). Another (S2) commented on difficulties she was currently experiencing working with a particular education assistant, making her realise how important it was to work together for the benefit of the students. This participant valued the support she received from other teaching colleagues, and found this sustained her teaching practice.

Experiences involving a lack of support from administration (7%) also arose, with one participant recounting that she received no administrative support when teaching a child with disabilities who was disruptive (S33). Another participant commented on having a school principal who was ignorant of early childhood staff and children (S24), while another chose to transfer from her previous school after conflict with the school administration, but failed to expand on the circumstances surrounding this experience (S34). Similarly, a participant related a negative experience where she was:

> Not being treated as a professional, and being told what we should be doing. Having to go against my better judgement and conform to practices not appropriate to an early childhood setting. (S17).

Participants indicated that their belief in and commitment to early childhood practices contributed to their sustainment during these experiences.

Incidences involving conflict with parents were also recounted by participants (7%). Working through a confrontation and gaining hierarchical support

enabled participants in the third focus group (F3) to sustain their teaching, with one participant stating “it was not just having the support, but also knowing that it would be there” (F3). Two survey participants also experienced a parent complaining about classroom incidents and found the support from their school administrator was sustaining (S13, S19). In contrast, one survey participant referred to parental pressure, combined with lack of administrative and employer support, but failed to provide specific details (S12).

A unique experience involving educational change was also disclosed. Having returned to the workforce after several years, one participant (S10) struggled with changes involving the widespread use of acronyms. It was through reading widely and working “fulltime” in a “part-time job” (S10) that this participant felt “competent and confident,” and was sustained in her teaching practice.

In recounting negative experiences participants revealed that relationships with students, work colleagues, parents and school administrators are significant to their sustainment in teaching. These participants also indicated that in persevering and focussing on small achievements, modifying practice and adhering to their educational beliefs, as well as relying on support from within the profession, they were sustained during critical teaching incidences.

Summary

The findings from this phase of the data collection indicate that the participating early childhood teachers have both shared and unique understandings relating to their sustainment in teaching. Common and recurring factors emerged, impacting on participants’ sustainment of professional commitment, job satisfaction and occupational motivation. These factors included relationships with students and work colleagues, student growth and development, flexibility and autonomy in teaching practice, conditions of employment, personal and educational beliefs, and relationships with students’ parents and school administrators. Participants’ recounts of positive and negative teaching experiences further confirmed that these factors are significant to their sustainment in teaching.

Participants also indicated that their work colleagues, attitudes, realistic expectations and access to professional development and written resources impacted on their sustaining effective teaching practices in the classroom, while coping with the daily demands of teaching and implementation of educational change. Other common factors also arose, including participants' belief in their ability to make a difference and their self-efficacy. Consideration of health-related issues and organizational and time-management strategies, as well as the rationalisation and adaptation of change all impinged on their sustainment in the classroom and ability to maintain a life-work balance. For participants in this phase of data collection, these factors held different degrees of relevance, according to their individual teaching experiences, beliefs and practice.

The findings from this first phase of data collection are further discussed in the seventh chapter, where they are compared to the reviewed literature and the findings which arose from the second phase of data collection: the case studies. The findings from the case studies are described in the next chapter.

CHAPTER SIX: THE CASE STUDIES

The second phase of the research, involving six cases studies of early childhood teachers who had taught more than 20 years in the classroom, was conducted over a 7 month period. Each case study consisted of five semi-structured interviews, based on participants' teaching background, educational beliefs, pedagogical practice and the questions used in the first phase of data collection.

Meetings were arranged at mutually convenient times, either during the participants' Duties Other Than Teaching time (DOTT) or after the school day had finished. Interviews were taped for later transcription and took place at the schools where participants were currently appointed, either in their classroom or an office; the exception being Gwen, whose interviews took place in the front room of her home, in the early evening. Interview sessions varied in duration, from 35 to 125 minutes, depending on the participants' responses and willingness to continue. Informal conversation often followed the taped sessions. Any relevant information arising from such conversations was post-noted and discussed in the following taped interview session.

Case study participants were asked to verify written copies of their interview transcripts, adding any information relevant to their sustainment in teaching. Each participant's written documentation was analysed separately, using the same process and headings as in the first phase of the study. Summary sheets of individual participant's sustaining factors were sent to the appropriate participant for further verification and validation.

The findings of each case study were reported under the following headings: professional commitment, job satisfaction, occupational motivation, effective teaching practices, coping with the daily demands of teaching, coping with educational change and critical experiences in sustainment. In addition, participants' own understandings of these headings were included, relating participant's responses to their individual interpretation of terms. Finally, pseudonyms were assigned to each participant and any identifying locations removed, to preserve participant anonymity.

Case Study One: Barbara

Description of the Location

The five interviews with Barbara (pseudonym) took place in the Deputy Principal's office, at the school where she was currently teaching. This small room was shared between three staff members, one being Barbara in her capacity as acting Deputy Principal. The interviews were conducted while the other two occupants were otherwise engaged, enabling each session to proceed with a degree of privacy.

During each interview session Barbara sat at her desk, with the researcher opposite, and a tape recorder positioned between them. The office door was partly closed to discourage disruption. When people entered the room to leave messages tape recording was paused, recommencing once the persons had left. Each of the five interviews was conducted a week apart and lasted between 30 and 45 minutes.

Barbara's Teaching Background

Barbara is a teacher in her late-forties with 21 years of teaching experience in early childhood education. Graduating in 1975 as a kindergarten to year seven teacher with a Diploma in Education, Barbara upgraded her qualifications to a Bachelor of Education in 1996.

Initially teaching a pre-primary (P) to year three class in rural Queensland for a year Barbara then moved to Western Australia to teach kindergarten students for a year in the State's South West. After a break of 8 years, Barbara resumed her career, teaching junior primary classes for 8 years in the State's North West, before transferring to her current metropolitan position, where she has taught pre-primary and year one students for the past 11 years.

In addition to classroom teaching Barbara has acted as Early Literacy (ELIC) Teacher, Library and Resource Manager, Key Teacher, Focus Teacher for First Steps, Cost Centre Manager for English and Learning Area Coordinator for English. Barbara has also been a founding member of a Playgroup Committee and two rural School Councils as well as an active member of the Australian Literacy Educators Association (ALEA) for the past 10 years. In 1998 Barbara achieved Level 3 Status with the Western Australian Department of Education and Training (DET), a

promotional position for accomplished practising teachers. At the time of the interviews Barbara was in a temporary position acting as Deputy Principal, teaching a P/1 class one day a week.

Barbara's Professional Commitment

Barbara understood the term *professional commitment* to mean:

> That you do the work to the best of your ability, and it's a job that will never end, but you've got to realise that there's got to be a balance in your life. So you do the very best you can, for the time that you can commit. And I know that sometimes I have to pull back, because of family or because of health, or whatever, and other times I give it my all. (Barbara, Interview#4, 3/6/04, p. 41).

Professional commitment has always been important to Barbara, defined by her family upbringing and values:

> It was important that we did the best we could… We were never pushed that we had to do things better or keep going, but if we chose to do something then put our best into it. (Barbara, Interview#2, 19/5/04, p.13).

Barbara also acknowledges that her professional commitment has not always been at the same level, as factors such as family commitments and personal health have sometimes had to take precedence. Although Barbara has learnt, through experience, that it is important to maintain a life-work balance, she is still prepared to extend her engagement in the profession, when circumstances permit, stating "Education is very important to me… I believe that's where I should be and I think you can always do better so I always want to know a bit more" (Barbara, Interview# 1, 12/5/04, p. 8).

Improving her teaching practice continues to be part of Barbara's professional commitment. Influenced by an early childhood lecturer during her pre-service training, Barbara learnt to access educational literature to improve her pedagogy; a habit Barbara has continued throughout her teaching career. Undertaking studies to complete a Bachelor of Education increased Barbara's confidence as a teacher, leading her to seek and be granted Level 3 teacher status. The process of applying for a promotional position, which involved self-reflection and portfolio development, strengthened Barbara's commitment to early childhood education.

Barbara also sustains her professional commitment through involvement in educational organizations and events outside the classroom. Rural experiences included membership in committees which founded a playgroup and in 2 School Councils, as well as attending professional development (PD) sessions, including those related to First Steps, an educational program developed by DET to enhance the teaching of literacy. In moving to the metropolitan area Barbara joined ALEA, and became involved in the local council, participating in various functions. Barbara has continued to frequent professional development sessions, including those run by Meerilinga Young Children's Foundation Incorporated (MYCF), an organization devoted to promoting early childhood learning. Barbara also attends district early childhood network meetings. These opportunities allow Barbara to extend her knowledge and engage in professional discourse with like-minded teachers.

Barbara's belief in supporting others within the profession further sustains her professional commitment. In one rural community Barbara collaborated with a kindergarten teacher, sharing ideas and resources for planning and documentation. As First Steps Coordinator at one school, Barbara worked with novice teachers to expand their teaching pedagogy. In her current role as English Learning Area Coordinator, Barbara continues to assist her colleagues, often through indirect means, such as the acquisition of quality teaching resources. At the time of the interviews, Barbara was also involved in university sessional work with pre-service students, extending her engagement in the profession.

To sustain her professional commitment Barbara devotes time outside the classroom to meet with other educationalists, both her peers and experts in the field. Reading educational literature and attending professional development sessions, network meetings, university courses and early childhood associations contributes to Barbara remaining focussed and engaged in the profession. Barbara also considers her self-development as a teacher to be a factor sustaining her professional commitment: an approach she hopes to continue throughout her teaching career.

Barbara's Job Satisfaction

Barbara considered *job satisfaction* as "Being involved. We have to be. Job satisfaction is being happy with what you are doing, with where you're going" (Barbara, Interview#4, 3/6/04, p. 41).

During her time as a teacher Barbara has enjoyed and learnt from each teaching experience. The present opportunity of being in administration has affirmed to Barbara that she is happiest when working with children:

> I'm happy to continue in the classroom while I feel that I can give the best I can. I like to be fulltime. I like to be in the junior area. I love the P/1's. I love that. (Barbara, Interview#4, 3/6/04, p. 45).

In addition, Barbara gains pleasure from celebrating children's successes, in particular when they achieve something for the first time:

> I think it's when you see the light go on in a child's eyes, or something they haven't known or understood, probably understood- that's better- that can be your greatest joy. (Barbara, Interview#3, 26/5.04, p. 37).

As well as observing daily incidences of student learning, Barbara enjoys seeing her students grow and develop over a period of time. Staying at her current school for over 11 years has allowed Barbara to derive pleasure from observing the progress made by her students throughout their primary education.

Furthermore, Barbara enjoys working in a social context, meeting and interacting with different people: children, parents, teachers and education assistants. Barbara is aware that classroom teaching can be isolating, so consciously seeks out her colleagues during the day, to be part of a team and provide collegial support to her peers:

> It's supporting each other, but its both sides. You don't just take, you give as well. So if someone's out on duty and it's a miserable day you either offer to take some time or would you like a hot cuppa out there. So we try to look after each other because, you know (sic), you work pretty hard the whole time the kids are here. (Barbara, Interview#3, 26/5/04, p. 31).

Team work and colleagues' social support also contribute to Barbara developing a learning environment suited to her students' needs, a factor that further sustains Barbara's job satisfaction.

Barbara's job satisfaction is intrinsically related to being with and working with children. Barbara gains pleasure from her daily interactions with her students, their ongoing growth and development, as well as through working with others in a supportive work environment.

Barbara's Occupational Motivation

For Barbara *occupational motivation* means "commitment, interest, again balance, going outside the field of the classroom" (Barbara, Interview#4, 3/6/04, p. 41). Barbara also stated:

> I've never felt like stopping and I've always had the belief that if I didn't enjoy what I was doing and continue to learn then it was time to give up teaching. (Barbara, Interview#4, 3/6/04, p. 40).

Factors that contribute to Barbara's job satisfaction also sustain her occupational motivation: interacting with her students and colleagues, having fun, supporting each other and learning together.

Feeling valued by others, particularly within the school, is a source of motivation. Barbara recalled when she returned to teaching full-time, after several years break, she felt motivated because she was treated as a professional by the administration and staff. Her alliance with professional educational bodies, such as ALEA, has reinforced this belief. At her current school Barbara found:

> I was really encouraged to have a go. To really build up my expertise and I went on as many PD's (professional development sessions) I could find and were interested in. Especially from coming from the country to here, you think -Wow! It was all available. I was quite enthused in that. (Barbara, Interview#1, 12/5/04, p. 10).

Going outside the classroom, meeting other educationalists and engaging in professional discourse keeps Barbara in touch with current thinking, stimulating her to learn further and remain an early childhood educator.

Recently, however, in attending district-based administrative meetings, Barbara discovered not all school administrators share a respect for early childhood educators and their work. While this is a concern, Barbara continues to be motivated to teach in early childhood settings, valuing the respect and recognition she receives from teaching colleagues and students' parents.

Over time Barbara has also become more aware of the need to reflect and make adjustments to her life, ensuring she maintains a life-work balance, taking into consideration the career aspirations of herself and her husband and her own health and energy levels. At the time of the interviews, Barbara was reassessing her future career path, either in promotional opportunities or a change in location. Barbara reflected she still had a love of teaching young students, and wanted to keep teaching, so would continue doing that, as long as she could maintain a balance.

Barbara's Effective Teaching Practices

Barbara defined *effective teaching practices* as*:*

> Making a difference to the children that one is teaching, and I mean that across the domains. So to be effective, you've got to make a difference… I think to be an effective teacher you don't have to have a particular style. It's the relationship you have with the children you're teaching. And whether you can help them learn, achieve, get a love of learning, see learning as long term, be able to interact with others, be confident in themselves, be well balanced in their body and their creativity. (Barbara, Interview#4, 3/6/04, p. 41)

Barbara's teaching has become guided by "learning by the children, and from the children" (Interview#2, 19/5/04, p.20). Observing, listening and talking to students enables Barbara to identify their basic understandings and implement a broad thematic program that provides a blend of teacher-directed and child-directed tasks to cater for students' needs.

Acquisition of knowledge, combined with reflective thinking sustains Barbara's effective teaching practice. While Barbara's pre-service training provided a sound grounding in early childhood pedagogy, Barbara does not follow a particular philosophy, preferring to read widely and reflect, directed by the needs of her students:

> I would pick and choose. And usually when I'm after something, when I've got that feeling that there's a need (sic), I will go and look for something that will give me more relevant information and data. (Barbara, Interview#2, 19/5/04, p. 16).

In her first year of teaching Barbara became proactive in seeking information, a practice she has continued throughout her career. Reading educational literature and engaging in professional discourse with teaching colleagues are prime sources of information. Furthermore, when given the opportunity to attend

professional development sessions Barbara actively pursues it, valuing professional development as a means of updating her teaching skills. In particular, knowledge gained from First Steps Professional Development still directs Barbara's planning and teaching practice.

Within the School, sharing ideas informally with teaching colleagues and her education assistant further sustains Barbara's teaching practice:

> I use their knowledge as well, because they see different things differently. I think you've got to be careful that sometimes you perceive a child in a way. It's always good to get other people's views, because it's really (sic), it gives you a more all over picture about a child. (Barbara, Interview#2, 19/5/04, p. 17).

Parents also contribute by informing Barbara of students' needs and are encouraged to share any issues or concerns. Acquired information provides Barbara with a basis for reflection, sustaining her delivery of quality education to her students.

The experience of teaching has also contributed to Barbara' s pedagogical expertise, formed and refined through working in a range of circumstances, including teaching over 120 kindergarten children a week in sessional groups, many with learning, speech and gross motor difficulties. Teaching in other locations made Barbara aware of the need to help not only the general group, but also individuals as well. Migrant, itinerant and Aboriginal children all presented significant challenges. Having taught in isolated locations where advice was scarce, Barbara learnt to value written educational resources to sustain her teaching practice.

Barbara's intrinsic motivation and belief in doing the best for her students has led Barbara to continually reflect on and modify her teaching practice. Accessing written resources, attending professional development sessions, and engaging in dialogue with teaching colleagues, students and parents informs Barbara's teaching practice. Close observation of students enables Barbara to develop and implement a teaching program suited to their needs. These factors contribute to Barbara sustaining her effective teaching practice in the classroom.

Barbara's Coping with the Daily Demands of Teaching

When discussing her sustainment in teaching Barbara stated:

> I think its learning about balance… So, I think that sustainability is being able to give your best, but realise you are a human being and you have lots of different facets, which if you look after them, will benefit your teaching anyway. (Barbara, Interview#4, 3/6/04, p. 42).

For Barbara, this has meant putting her life in balance, adjusting her work and personal commitments to cope with the daily demands of teaching.

Being organised is a contributing factor to Barbara's sustainment: spending time outside school hours, taking work home and working on the weekend to prepare for her teaching role. A Daily Work Pad in the form of a weekly overview, provides Barbara with a framework, facilitating flexibility in practice. Paperwork, such as notices and planning documentation, are produced outside of school hours, to minimize distraction from the teaching process.

In the classroom, Barbara arrives at school an hour before the students to prepare the class environment and daily activities. The education assistant assists in organisational tasks such as placing money orders and fruit bowls outside the classroom away from the learning environment. When students arrive at school both Barbara and the education assistant are prepared and available to greet students, facilitating a smooth transition into the learning environment.

Another coping strategy Barbara employs is to foster a team approach, sharing responsibilities with her education assistant and involving parents in the teaching program. Barbara values their contributions and the expertise they offer. Barbara also finds when her energy levels are low she can rely on her education assistant to assume greater responsibilities. For Barbara, working in a social setting means you do things together, supporting and sustaining each other.

Barbara also values routines, established early in the school year, to ensure children know what is expected of them. Routines specifically taught include the order of the day, placement of belongings, tidy up practices and appropriate classroom behaviours. Barbara finds:

> They're (routines) good for me and they're good for the children. I find that I already know in my mind what's coming, the assistant will know basically what's coming, the order, and the children are aware of it. (Barbara, Interview#3, 26/5/04, p. 27).

In contrast, out of school Barbara likes to break routines as much as possible so that she doesn't feel her life is rigidly structured.

Aware that time constraints undermine her ability to cope, Barbara deliberately plans for opportunities in the day where she can engage in self-reflection and discourse with students, activities that sustain her teaching practice. Flexibility in time management and implementation of lessons affords Barbara the freedom to adapt activities to meet not only the needs of her students, but also her own health and energy levels. Having sustained a work-related back injury several years ago, Barbara is sometimes physically unable to do what she has planned. In the classroom Barbara uses a modified chair that enables her to "scoot" around the room, placing less strain on her back (Barbara, Interview#3, 26/5/04, p. 29). Activities are also amended according to students' attentiveness. As long as the students complete the non-negotiable task for the day Barbara is willing for them to engage in alternative, often quieter, activities.

Barbara is also aware of the need to look after her health and well-being, both physically and emotionally. This means having early nights during the week, and making a point of unwinding on the weekend, enjoying a glass of wine, watching a movie, reading a book, fishing, or going for a walk. Taking sufficient time off work when unwell also ensures Barbara is physically and mentally able to cope with her teaching responsibilities.

Barbara has developed a range of organizational strategies and routines that allow to her to continue teaching. Through her teaching experiences and reflective thinking Barbara has identified potential stressors, such as time and personal well-being, making a deliberate effort to minimize their impact. In developing a balance in her life, Barbara copes with the daily demands of teaching.

Barbara's Coping with Educational Change

When describing *educational change* Barbara stated:

> I'd like to say that its ways of improving what we're doing in education, that therefore assist our students to be more effective as human beings in the future. Unfortunately I don't think all educational change has that as their underpinning goal. (Barbara, Interview#4, 3/6/04, p. 42).

Regardless of the rationale behind educational changes Barbara remains enthused, stating "there's so many interesting things happening and I want to be part of it" (Barbara, Interview#4, 3/6/04, p. 45).

Early involvement in educational change has contributed to Barbara's ability to cope with educational change. Exposure to original documentation relating to Outcome Statements during her years as a First Steps teacher, gave Barbara an insight into the rationale behind curriculum changes. Through ALEA Barbara has also been involved in developing the Viewing Outcomes for the English Learning Area of Student Outcome Statements. These experiences have allowed Barbara to understand the change process.

In implementing educational change, Barbara has continued to follow the advice of an early childhood lecturer from her pre-service training:

> She said, that look at all the programs that are being thrust on us and make sure it's what you think is appropriate. Pick the eyes out of it. And that's something to this day that I try to do. I don't take on things wholus-bolus, but say what is the best out of this, or what suits the kids (sic). (Barbara, Interview#1, 12/5/04, p. 4).

Following this advice, Barbara attends educational functions and meetings to be informed of current trends, but is selective in her implementation and practice.

Line-manager support has also empowered Barbara to be engaged in the change process. The encouragement of school administrators has contributed to Barbara accessing applicable professional development sessions and joining educational bodies, such as ALEA. In addition, Barbara has been assigned roles, such as First Steps Teacher and English Learning Area Coordinator, where she shares her knowledge and enthusiasm with others, finding a collaborative approach to be sustaining during the implementation of educational changes.

Involvement in the change process, being aware of the rationale and developing a clear understanding of where the change is leading, allows Barbara to remain positive and cope with changes within the education system. As Barbara stated:

> I think with any change that comes in, we've got to remember what good practice is and what makes the difference for kids… I know with standards coming in that we need to be very clear of where we are going, what we need to do and that we're doing things. So again, I've been a little bit of a step ahead in looking at some of this stuff. So when it actually comes out I'm not worried because I've had the lead in, and I'd like now, my chance now, is to make it easier for the staff here generally (sic). (Barbara, Interview#2, 19/5/04, p. 23).

Barbara's Critical Experiences in Sustainment

Barbara looks on her years of teaching as an ongoing learning experience, each situation contributing to her sustainment as an early childhood teacher. Barbara admits that her family background and values have played a significant part in her remaining in teaching:

> They (Barbara's parents) valued education. Yes. They thought it was important. They'd been through the era where they didn't have much, the Depression and that…It was important that we did the best we could… At what ever we could do, have a go. (Barbara, Interview#2, 19/5/04, p. 13).

In her first year of teaching, when Barbara was reprimanded by the School Inspector for her students' weak work standards, Barbara realised the full implications and responsibilities of teaching: just enjoying being with children wasn't enough, she was accountable for their learning. This experience taught Barbara to access information and to continue to improve and expand her pedagogical knowledge and practice.

Years of moving from one location to another, and being employed in a range of temporary positions, strengthened Barbara's ability to be adaptive to working in different environments and meeting students' needs. Teaching in isolated locations also taught Barbara to value written resources. It wasn't until Barbara received permanent status and became a First Steps teacher that she was fully able to access professional development opportunities and network with professional colleagues. During this time, the support and encouragement of Barbara's line

manager contributed to her upgrading her skills, sustaining her occupational motivation and professional commitment.

Teaching at her current school has also contributed to Barbara's sustainment, being able to access professional development sessions, further her education, join professional educational bodies, and, with the encouragement of her line manager and husband, to pursue career aspirations. The stability of this setting has also allowed Barbara to develop collaborative relationships with the staff and students' parents, as well as observe the progress made by her students during their primary education.

Barbara also related two particular incidences at her current school that impacted on her sustainment as a teacher. The first occurred over 12 years ago, and involved teaching in a classroom next to a traditional-styled teacher:

> I had a traditional teacher in the class beside me, the children sat in rows. It was very quiet. It was very neat. It was all the same. And all the artwork was exactly the same around the room. So the parents were thinking, and of course, we were side-by-side. And I don't have an untidy room but I have a lot of stuff around, and movement, and talk and things that are very different. It's like what a child is able to do. So, it became an issue for me, to question what is right. Because I looked at some of the standards and I thought am I getting my students to the same standards? But there were some things that were wrong, and they didn't fit my philosophy about children having a go at their own level, being proud of what they can do. (Barbara, Interview#2, 19/5/04, p. 20).

Parent comments and self-doubts caused Barbara to re-assess her teaching beliefs and practices. Barbara read widely, reflected on her readings and wrote copious notes on what she believed about children and learning. This experience made Barbara very certain of her beliefs, sustained her commitment to early childhood education and lead Barbara to complete her Bachelor of Education and apply for, and be granted, Level 3 Teacher Status.

The second experience occurred a few years after the first and involved teaching two difficult year one classes, including several students that were unable to work independently, exhibiting poor social skills and challenging behaviours. Having never previously experienced major behavioural difficulties, Barbara's confidence was undermined, "I felt like I was letting the other kids down. I wasn't

being able to give them what they needed" (Barbara, Interview#5, 10/6/04, p. 58). After trialling several strategies, Barbara sought the advice of a school psychologist:

> It was someone to talk to, but they said- look you've just got to be realistic, you can't give that energy level all the time, go back to traditional and put them in rows and treat them in that way. And I did it, but it was probably the hardest thing for me to do, because I felt I had let down my beliefs and I felt I was letting the kids down. But, with time…I wasn't trying to be everything to everyone, I could actually regain some of that energy and towards the end of the year it was actually getting better. (Barbara, Interview#5, 10/6/04, p. 58).

With the support of her students' parents and adhering to this advice, Barbara was sustained in her teaching practice. Consequently, Barbara learnt to pre-empt potential problems before they arise, clearly state her expectations of students early in the school year, and to establish firm routines. Barbara also learnt from this experience to be realistic, adjusting her teaching practices to meet her energy levels and do what is best for the students.

In working through difficult situations Barbara feels that she is a better teacher, more attuned to meeting her students' needs. Her teaching experiences have enabled Barbara to reflect on life and understand people better, supporting those in need, when she can. Although acknowledged by both her peers and employer as a teacher of exemplary practice, Barbara does not feel this to be the case. Rather, Barbara considers herself a lifelong learner, willing to continue teaching in early childhood education as long as she enjoys it and can maintain a balance in her life.

Barbara's Summary

Having taught for over 21 years in the field of early childhood education Barbara considers that the experience of teaching has contributed to her being the teacher she is today. Through accessing a range of resources, attending professional development, joining educational bodies, and associating with teaching colleagues Barbara has sustained her professional commitment, keeping pace with current practices and changes.

Barbara has gained job satisfaction through being with young children and being able to make a difference to their development. Barbara has also enjoyed working in a social context, collaborating with others, developing a rapport and

empathy with students, parents and colleagues. These factors also contribute to her on-going motivation to remain in teaching.

As a lifelong learner Barbara is intrinsically motivated to find new and better ways of doing things. Barbara has also been inspired to develop effective teaching practices to meet the needs of her students, taking time to observe and talk with students to identify their levels of understanding. Collegial advice, acquisition of written resources, professional development sessions and participation in educational bodies outside the classroom has extended and sustained Barbara's pedagogical practice. The support of her family, line managers and professional colleagues has also contributed to her sustainment in teaching.

Over the passing of time Barbara has become more aware of her health and well-being as factors impacting on her sustainment in teaching. Barbara has learnt to be organised, establish routines early in the year and be adaptive to the needs of her students and her own personal energy levels. Barbara also collaborates with parents and her education assistant to develop a team approach, valuing social support as a means of sustaining her daily practice.

Whilst educational change is ongoing and the demands of teaching appear unending, Barbara has continued to be enthused about early childhood education, sustained in her teaching through enjoying and believing in what she is doing, and at the same time, continuing to want to do better.

Case Study Two: Gwen

Description of the Location

The second case study was conducted concurrently with the first and third case studies, over a period of 3 months. The four interviews took place each fortnight, after school hours, in the front room of Gwen's (pseudonym) private residence. As no one else was home at these times, the interviews were conducted in a relaxed atmosphere, without interruption. Each interview lasted approximately 50 minutes, although the fourth session continued over 105 minutes as Gwen, owing to personal commitments, preferred to extend this session rather than proceed with a fifth interview.

Gwen's Teaching Background

Gwen is an early childhood teacher in her mid 50's, who has taught students from kindergarten to year three level for over 35 years. Gwen completed 3 years of pre-service teacher training in Victoria, 1969, gaining an Infant Teachers Certificate, which she later upgraded to a Bachelor of Education in 1981.

After teaching for 3 years in inner-suburban Melbourne, Gwen relocated to Western Australia where she taught year one and year 2 students at a coastal metropolitan school for 17 years before moving to her current school, where she has taught year one students for 12 years, and kindergarten and pre-primary students for the past 3 years. Whilst working at this school Gwen has also achieved Senior Teacher Status with the DET, and acts as the School's Curriculum Improvement Officer.

Gwen's Professional Commitment

When defining *professional commitment* Gwen stated:

> I think that I have to operate as part of the big picture. The world, what's happening there, in the educational world. What's happening in Australia. You have to keep up with what's happening there" (Gwen, Interview#4, 21/6/04, p. 47).

To remain committed to her profession Gwen needs to know current policies and productive teaching pedagogical practices. Consequently, ongoing learning contributes to sustaining Gwen's professional commitment.

Professional commitment wasn't something Gwen thought about in her early years of teaching:

> At the time I was just 20 or 21, it (teaching) was just something I did in the daytime and then at night I went out. In Melbourne there were lots of things to do. I was right in the thick of things. I had a social life, big! I'd even go out until 2 or 3 o'clock in the morning and easily get up and go to work the next day. Not a problem! (Gwen, Interview#1, 12/5/04, p. 6).

Increasingly frustrated by the use of what Gwen considered to be antiquated teaching practices she became more committed to the teaching profession:

> So still the same teaching style really. The learning by rote philosophy. Although I can remember we used to do the flashcard drills with sight words and I used to hate this. This was so boring! It's boring for me and boring for the kids. So I was beginning to question why we did things. So fairly early in my time, within that 5 years, I was accessing the people at the District Office. (Gwen, Interview#1, 12/5/04, p. 8).

During this time Gwen met a like-minded colleague, a professional mentor, who encouraged her to implement practices she had learnt during her training, particularly in the field of mathematics, to write articles for the District Newsletter and to trial new resources as they became available.

Undertaking studies and exposure to reputable educators has strengthened and sustained Gwen's professional commitment. Studying for her Bachelor of Education not only reinforced Gwen's existing knowledge but provided exposure to reputable educators of that time, such as Frank Smith who emphasised that children learn to read by reading, and Bill Martin, who encouraged the use of rhyme and rhythm in reading. Gwen continues to value recognised educators and seeks out like-minded people to sustain her professional commitment:

> I do that by going to conferences and being part of the EYES (Early Years in Education Society) Committee. And so that really gives me much more access to educational research and ideas, than if I just attended conferences, because we'll talk about the visiting speakers…Throughout the years there's been lots and lots of occasions where visiting educationalists and experts have come to WA, and if I was able to, I would always try to go. (Gwen, Interview#4, 21/6/04, p. 47).

Gwen also attends professional development sessions, local early childhood teachers' network groups, and interest groups associated with trends in early childhood education, such as a Reggio Emilia group, to broaden her interests and sustain professional commitment.

Collegial support also contributes to Gwen's professional commitment. In her first teaching experience, Gwen's peers from her pre-service training provided her with support and continue to remain her friends, though distance has meant their close support is limited. At Gwen's second school it was a curriculum officer at the local district office who provided Gwen with support:

> She was very encouraging, and encouraging me to try new things. Supportive, and when you've got someone around you doing that then it's good to get, well, good vibes from other people. (Gwen, Interview#2, 20/5/04, p. 14).

In her current school Gwen's line managers are a source of support, appointing Gwen as Curriculum Improvement Officer, facilitating her access to associated PD. The current principal instigated Gwen's change to teaching kindergarten and pre-primary students and continues to praise Gwen for her teaching efforts. Furthermore, Gwen has been encouraged to participate in school-based decision-making, and feels that her early childhood perspective is valued, further sustaining her commitment to teaching.

For Gwen, her professional commitment to teaching has developed in association with her experiences in teaching. Support from within the profession, by teaching colleagues and line managers, has been a prime factor in Gwen's sustainment. Attendance at various educational functions has provided Gwen with opportunities for professional discourse, exposure to current trends and ongoing learning, further sustaining Gwen's commitment to early childhood education.

Gwen's Job Satisfaction

Gwen interpreted *job satisfaction* to mean:

> To be satisfied in your job you have to really like working with children and like working with parents, because they're our clients. And, you have to, to a certain degree, operate as a member of a whole staff. (Interview#4, 21/6/04, p. 49).

Throughout her life Gwen has enjoyed working with young children, specifically requesting to teach the younger students at each school she has been appointed to. In particular Gwen has enjoyed her recent teaching experiences with kindergarten and pre-primary aged children, and the practice of "looping," teaching the same students

2 years in a row. These experiences have allowed Gwen to strengthen her rapport with parents and students, making her daily interactions rewarding:

> You can talk about theory and you can talk about networks and talk about curriculum leaders, but what I really like is the kids! The kindy kids, and especially the pre-primaries, because I have such an attachment to them. Because I've known them for 18 months. They are fantastic! I love being with them, because they're stimulating and they're enthusiastic and they collaborate and they care about each other Gwen, (Interview#4, 21/6/04, p. 46).

Gwen also enjoys developing activities and a learning program that her students will enjoy:

> I really like to do what the kids are interested in. I might plan to do something and they might do it but then I might find they're interested in this, like The Very Hungry Caterpillar. I mean we could still be doing that at Christmas time if they're interested! (Gwen, Interview#3, 10/6/04, p. 41).

Staying at a school for a number of years further contributes to Gwen's job satisfaction and ability to develop a rapport with parents:

> I just think I get really comfortable. I like the continuity. The other thing is that I get to know the children, I get to know the families and I get to know the parents. And another good thing is that the parents get to know me. And that builds their trust and their confidence. And it just makes life much easier for me, and for them, because they trust me. (Gwen, Interview#4, 21/6/04, p. 43).

Gwen also enjoys the opportunity, unique to early childhood education, of inducting parents into the education system and developing long-term relationships with parents. Stability in her teaching location has allowed Gwen to observe the progression of her students through their primary school years, often teaching siblings of her previous students.

Working in a pleasant work environment further contributes to sustaining Gwen's job satisfaction. Gwen has fond memories of her first school:

> The school was lovely because it had a beautiful hall in the centre, with classrooms around the edge. So this hall was gorgeous, it had wooden floors and high ceilings. It was a lovely place for singing and assemblies. So the school had a really nice tone. (Gwen, Interview#1, 12/5/04, p. 6).

At Gwen's present school, initially a junior school, catering for students from pre-primary to year two, working in an environment surrounded by like-minded

teachers, with buildings and resources suited to early childhood learning contributes to Gwen's job satisfaction:

> I really liked that because we had our own resources, all latched up to early childhood. We were all on the same wavelength and if we had to make any decisions about money to be spent our kids always benefited from it. (Gwen, Interview#2, 20/5/04, p. 17).

A multitude of factors impact on Gwen's job satisfaction: continuity, the work environment, appropriate resources and collaboration with her teaching colleagues. While Gwen also sustains her job satisfaction through contact with parents and being able to put her early childhood beliefs into practice, it is her students who are her prime source of job satisfaction.

Gwen's Occupational Motivation

When discussing *occupational motivation*, in terms of staying in teaching, Gwen stated:

> If I hadn't enjoyed their company I wouldn't have stayed. I think that's really one of the most, one of the key factors of sustainability. You have to like kids. And you have to like sharing your time with them. (Gwen, Interview#4, 21/6/04, p. 47).

Although Gwen acknowledges that teaching provides her with an income, it is her students' enthusiasm and interest in learning that continues to inspire and sustain Gwen's occupational motivation. Accessing the advice of others, undertaking further studies and attending professional development sessions not only maintains Gwen's professional commitment, but also motivates Gwen to sustain quality education for her students.

The Curriculum Framework documentation further contributes to Gwen's occupational motivation:

> Now, the Curriculum Framework. I say to myself, I'm doing this. This isn't a problem to me… I could have written it. I didn't but when I read it I think I do that. That's right! That's how I feel about it. It's really great to have that written in a book somewhere, instead of having it all over the shop in a 100 books, here it is in one book. So say, if I decided to go and work in another country, that would be the first book I would pack. (Gwen, Interview#4, 21/6/04, p. 50-51).

Using the Curriculum Framework validates Gwen's beliefs and teaching efforts, reinforcing her self-efficacy, adding credibility to her teaching efforts teaching in early childhood settings.

The enjoyment of working with young children plays a major role in Gwen's role as an early childhood teacher, providing both job satisfaction and occupational motivation. Accessing professional development, advice from reputable educationalists and current documentation such as the Curriculum Framework, supports Gwen in sustaining her occupational motivation, but it is her students that motivate Gwen to continue in teaching.

Gwen's Effective Teaching Practices

In discussing her teaching practices, Gwen commented:

> I never taught the same as other people. And sometimes I used to think I must have been doing it wrong, but then realised- No, I wasn't doing it wrong. I was doing it my way, and I was doing it the way I thought was the best way. (Gwen, Interview#2, 20/5/04, p. 14).

Throughout her career Gwen has always preferred a child-centred approach to teaching. Strengthened by the self-belief that she is a competent teacher Gwen has continued to teach according to her own beliefs and look for ways to support and improve her teaching practice.

During her first years of teaching Gwen was forced to adopt traditional teaching strategies, such as rote learning and reading schemes. Frustrated by these approaches, Gwen sought advice and support within the profession to improve her teaching pedagogy. Collegial support, from a DET school district curriculum officer and a teaching colleague, gave Gwen the confidence to put her beliefs into practice. In recent years the support and encouragement of her line manager, has sustained her teaching practice:

> There's always something to learn but I do think I'm a good teacher, because the boss tells me that every day when he sees me. And he means it, because he had this buddy at a school near by, a principal, and he said have you got anyone on your staff who is using the Outcomes in the classroom. And he said yes I have, and he came across to me and said would it be alright if I send some teachers to see and look. So, they came and had a look. So that sort of thing is re-affirming. (Gwen, Interview#2, 20/5/04, p. 20).

Gwen values accessing practical advice given by reputable educationalists, benefiting from reading quality early childhood literature and attending educational functions, including professional development sessions, interest group meetings and Early Years in Education (EYES) conferences, where she engages in professional discourse with like-minded colleagues:

> They're actually my peers, but not in my school. They're outside my school, but they're people who really are best practice… And they're at different stages of how far they are down the track, whether they're Reggio Emilia or child-centred or Project Approach or constructivist approach. Everyone has their own way of doing it. (Gwen, Interview#4, 21/6/04, p. 48).

Closely observing her students at work and at play, as well as involving them in informal dialogue, also sustains Gwen's effectiveness as an early childhood teacher:

> Sometimes I just watch what they do, and you can do that with kindy and pre-primary because they're so interesting. And their view of the world is interesting… So I've really become a child watcher, and that's a big contrast to 20 years ago where, you were like everybody else, stuck on delivering the curriculum. (Gwen, Interview#2, 20/5/04, p. 19).

Observation of her students enables Gwen to discover their interests and strengths, developing a learning program conducive to their particular needs.

Appropriate resources also impact on Gwen's ability to teach effectively. In her early teaching, resources were scarce, with a heavy reliance on flashcards and reading schemes, unconducive to Gwen's teaching style. Preferring to have resources that allow children to manipulate and explore their environment, Gwen has benefited from working at her current school, where resources are abundant, age-appropriate and suited to her preferred pedagogical approach.

Gwen's effective teaching practices have developed through her interaction with reputable educators and her students. Not consciously a reflective thinker, many of Gwen's teaching strategies have been adopted because "that's what I thought was right" (Gwen, Interview#4, 21/6/04, p.50). Knowledge of child development and close observations enable Gwen to sustain her effective teaching practices, utilising appropriate resources to facilitate student learning.

Gwen's Coping with the Daily Demands of Teaching

Over the years Gwen considers that the daily demands of teaching have increased, with increased accountability and written documentation adding to her teaching work-load, making time a premium.

While Gwen's first years of teaching were tiring, she was able to confine her teaching responsibilities to school-hours and considered out-of-school hours her own. Recent years have seen Gwen spend longer periods of time at school, often working after school-hours, taking work home and attending educational functions on the weekend, as a means of coping with her teaching responsibilities.

Friendships and a social life provide Gwen with a release from the daily demands of teaching. Gwen consciously tries to keep her home and work life separate, indulging in activities such as watching football and television, going for walks and talking with friends when possible to maintain a life-work balance. When time permits Gwen also pursues physical activities, such as aerobics and yoga, to unwind from the demands of her work.

Within her daily routine Gwen has consciously developed practices that alleviate her workload, but still provide quality education for her students. Having an informal start to the day, where children are involved in undirected play, allows Gwen the opportunity to observe and interact with her students. Rather than setting up specific tasks, learning centres are stocked with resources for children to select and develop their own activities. Students are also expected to maintain equipment and assist in all preparation duties during the school day. Parents are encouraged to participate in activities during this time, but are not rostered as helpers as Gwen finds their presence can be "distracting" (Gwen, Interview #5, 21/6/04, p. 55). These strategies not only foster student independence, but also minimise Gwen's preparation time and potential sources of stress.

Using a child-centred approach to learning allows Gwen to be flexible and sustained in her teaching practice. Learning activities are based on children's interests arising from their daily viewing of Play School, an early childhood television program. Students are encouraged to share their ideas in a supportive

circle, where Gwen uses questioning techniques to advance their thinking and generate possible forms of learning. A flexible timetable continues throughout the day, with Gwen changing tasks when children's interest or attentiveness drains. Keeping the day relaxed and informal, Gwen finds:

> What I do is: I'm like a duck on the water, calm on the top but paddling like heck underneath. I try to be calm, because there's no point in stressing with the kids. You don't want them to be stressed. (Gwen, Interview# 4, 21/6/04, p. 52).

Adopting this approach Gwen is able to operate effectively and efficiently, sustaining her teaching practice through the school day.

Gwen has also learnt to have realistic expectations of herself as a teacher, and takes short breaks to re-fresh herself when feeling tired or not coping:

> I'm not indispensable. Because if you think that you are then you can run yourself ragged and if you need to have time off because you're sick, well don't ever take time off!. So you keep working and get really bedraggled…I really do believe the kids like me and they know I'm fun to be with, but it could easily be someone else. So I just know that I'm not indispensable. I do as good a job as I can and then go home. (Gwen, Interview#4, 21/6/04, p. 53).

Knowing her limitations Gwen relies on the support of her education assistant to share teaching duties and preparation tasks, but assumes ultimate responsibility for her students' welfare. If incidences arise Gwen is prepared to seek the support of her school's administrative team, rather than cope on her own.

With a wealth of teaching experience behind her, Gwen has been able to cope with the daily demands of teaching by focussing on what she enjoys most, spending time with her students. Many of Gwen's teaching strategies maximise opportunities to facilitate this. At the same time Gwen has developed a teaching format that reduces demands on her time, particularly in regards to planning and preparation, and still allows her to sustain a quality teaching program for her students, while maintaining a life-work balance.

Gwen's Coping with Educational Change

To cope with demands related to educational change Gwen is proactive and tries to be involved early in the change process. This practice has enabled Gwen to have a greater understanding of the rationale behind the proposed changes and cope with the demands associated to its implementation.

Accessing information is a part of Gwen's coping practice. Early in her career a colleague at the DET district office kept Gwen informed of current trends and practices. In more recent years it is through attending professional development sessions and district network meetings, in her role as Curriculum Leader, that Gwen has received the most benefits:

> I've really had lots and lots of training in Outcomes education. So, I've been lucky because the normal classroom teacher hasn't had that. And to me that's how you really get to know what's happening, out there in the big world. What the big picture is. Because the people that talked to us, and that we worked with, they're leaders in their field… So, by having a network of leaders that I could tap into, that helped me gain heaps and heaps of information and develop my teaching" (Gwen, Interview#4, 21/6/04, p. 46).

Attendance at professional development sessions, including those run by DET in Numeracy Net and First Steps, keeps Gwen informed of current trends and how best to implement changes into her teaching practice.

Gwen is selective in adopting changes, taking time to choose what is appropriate for her students, "I use my knowledge and think. I don't just take anything on. I choose what I think is appropriate" (Gwen, Interview#3, 10/6/04, p. 31). Gwen also accepts that some changes are inevitable and part of her role as a teacher, "I take it on because the system has and you have to" (Gwen, Interview#3, 10/6/04, p. 40). The support and leadership demonstrated by Gwen's line managers, also contributes to the change process:

> The principal who has been with us for 18 months, or so, is a very collaborative person... And he's made a great effort to make sure that everyone feels involved. He's made a big effort to make sure everyone feels included in the decision making. And even if the decision may not affect me, he still values what I have to say. (Gwen, Interview#4, 21/6/04, p. 45).

Encouragement from the school administration to be involved and part of collaborative decision-making further empowers Gwen to cope with the demands associated to educational change.

In accessing information and early involvement in the change process Gwen is able to understand the rationale behind educational changes and make informed decisions, in regards to what is appropriate for her students. Through collaboration, and the support of her line managers and colleagues, Gwen is able to cope with demands related to educational changes and effectively implement changes into her teaching practice.

Gwen's Critical Experiences in Sustainment

When discussing critical incidents in her teaching career Gwen considered that the job satisfaction she received in her first few years of teaching has contributed to her staying in the teaching profession.

From the commencement of her teaching career Gwen enjoyed spending time with her students. The work hours and income derived from teaching also enabled her to pursue an active social life. Furthermore, Gwen found herself working for a compassionate employer: as the Victorian Education Department gave her a teaching appointment close to home, as her mother had died and she needed to care for her father. This allowed Gwen to maintain contact with her friends from her pre-service training and be supported from within the profession during her first years of teaching.

Although circumstances changed when Gwen moved to Western Australia and her subsequent marriage failed, Gwen re-assessed her options and decided that as she enjoyed working with young children, she would remain in teaching. Subsequently, Gwen's commitment to her chosen profession increased, and she sought ways to improve her teaching practice, including completion of a Bachelor of Education and accessing a local school district office for advice and support.

A negative experience in Gwen's seventeenth year of teaching threatened to undermine her sustainment in teaching. A clash of opinions with a new school

principal, initially relating to a parent of one of Gwen's students, then to her particular style of teaching, placed Gwen under duress. Feeling harassed by the principal and alienated by the staff, Gwen transferred to another school. Gwen found this time particularly stressful: "At the time it was awful and I actually lost a lot of weight. I was like a stick, because of the stress" (Gwen, Interview#2, 20/5/04, p. 17). It was through counselling and the support of an Education Department official and her second husband, that Gwen was able to cope with the situation. Although Gwen never doubted her teaching ability, the experience did undermine her sense of support from those within the profession.

The move to a new school did much to restore Gwen's resiliency, particularly when surrounded by teaching colleagues with similar ideologies, and being treated with respect by her line managers. In ensuring years Gwen was encouraged to become a senior teacher and the Curriculum Improvement Officer. More recently, her change to teaching kindergarten and pre-primary students, facilitated by her school principal, has allowed Gwen autonomy in teaching practice, affirming her belief that she is recognized as a quality teacher by those within her profession.

Gwen has continued to enjoy working with young children throughout her teaching career. During critical teaching experiences support from professional colleagues and line managers has been a significant factor impacting on Gwen's ability to be sustained as an early childhood teacher in the classroom. Throughout these experiences her belief in appropriate early childhood pedagogy and practice also contributed to her sustainment in teaching.

Gwen's Summary

Working and associating with young children has been the key factor contributing to Gwen's job satisfaction and sustainment in teaching. Gwen's students have also been a source of inspiration, motivating Gwen to extend her knowledge and implement strategies to extend and sustain her teaching practice.

The support of others within the profession, both teaching colleagues and line managers, has also been a prime factor in sustaining Gwen's professional

commitment. Encouraged to attend educational forums, such as professional development sessions, interest group meetings and conferences, facilitating access to like-minded professional peers and reputable educators, has strengthened Gwen's commitment to early childhood education ideologies and practice.

Professional support and access to credible knowledge has also given Gwen the confidence to trial new ideas, cope with the demands of educational change and extend herself as a teacher. A strong believer in a child-centred approach to learning and the role of play in child development, Gwen finds "I now watch children" (Gwen, Interview#2, 20/5/04, p. 11). Close observation of students allows Gwen to make learning experiences meaningful and relevant to her students, and sustain her effective teaching practice.

Gwen has also learnt to minimise potential stresses in her daily routine, while adhering to her educational beliefs. Aware that time is at a premium, Gwen has become flexible in her approach to teaching, accessing quality resources, rarely planning too far ahead or following rigid time schedules. Gwen shares daily tasks with her education assistant and students, fostering an environment of mutual cooperation. In developing a realistic awareness of her personal limitations Gwen has evolved a work climate that sustains her teaching beliefs and practices.

Over the years Gwen has found teaching has become more time-consuming and change is ongoing. Early involvement in educational change, accessing information and collaborating with others within the teaching profession has enabled Gwen to cope with these demands and remain an effective early childhood teacher. Although continuing to value professional support and access to information, it is Gwen's realistic expectations and empathy for her students that ultimately contribute to her sustainment in early childhood education.

Case Study Three: Rachel

Description of the Location

The five interviews with the third case study participant, Rachel (pseudonym), took place over a period of 6 weeks in Rachel's classroom, at the school where she was teaching, during her Duties Other Than Teaching (DOTT) time. Built apart from the other school buildings, Rachel's classroom was cluttered with an abundance of resources and learning centres. Consequently, the sessions were conducted informally in a partially cleared area, with both the participant and researcher either sitting on the floor or on student chairs near the tape recorder. Each interview lasted approximately 40 minutes. Informal discussion took place after the recorded interviews. Notes were kept of these discussions and used as a basis for further discussion in following interviews.

Rachel's Teaching Background

Rachel is an early childhood teacher in her late 40's, teaching kindergarten, pre-primary and year one students for nearly 23 years. Trained in England, Rachel initially gained a Pre-School Playgroup Qualification in 1980, then a 2 year teaching degree in early childhood education in 1987 before completing a Bachelor of Education (Honours) in 1994. Rachel achieved Classroom Teacher Level 3 status in 2001, a promotional position in teaching, with the DET, and for the past 10 years has been an active member of the Early Childhood Teachers' Association (ECTA).

Rachel's teaching career has been diverse, first teaching playgroup and kindergarten students in an English village for 4 years, then early childhood and multi-age groupings in Brunei for 3 years, before relocating to Western Australia, where she taught pre-primary students for 4 years at three government schools, prior to gaining her current position at a large metropolitan school in 1999. At her present school Rachel has taught pre-primary students, "looping" those students to teach them as year ones in the consecutive year, and for the past 2 years has taught kindergarten students.

Rachel's Professional Commitment

Rachel stated:

> As a teacher I would say professional commitment is a commitment to actually looking at doing your job to the best of your ability, if you can. But also keeping up with things that are going on, to make sure that you know what the latest research is. (Rachel, Interview#4, 2/7/04, p. 44).

Rachel's strength of conviction in the value of early childhood education underpinned her commitment to teaching:

> If you're going to do a good job, then you have to have a really strong belief in what you're doing. If you really don't know what you're doing you can't possibly do a good job, because you're constantly jumping from one thing to another, and you're looking at the surface things! And I think I have developed, through my interest over the years, a very strong understanding of what I'm doing. (Rachel, Interview#5, 9/7/04, p. 58).

A maternal interest in early childhood education expanded when Rachel was given the opportunity to work in her local playgroup. Rachel undertook training and continued to upgrade her qualifications, both in England and in Western Australia, to extend her knowledge of early childhood education. In addition, Rachel has become a prolific reader of literature relating to early childhood education and regularly accesses the Internet for articles on current research. These sources of information affirm Rachel's beliefs and commitment to teaching.

Working collaboratively with another teacher on staff, Lee (pseudonym), has empowered Rachel to use her knowledge, trial pedagogical approaches and engage in reflective dialogue to develop teaching strategies that enhance early childhood teachers' practice and student learning. In their own time Rachel and Lee conduct workshops for early childhood teachers and education assistants:

> We want to pass on what we have found out, what we know to other people. And we do that because we both enjoy doing it, and that doesn't become a chore. (Rachel, Interview#2, 18/6/04, p. 26).

These sessions enable Rachel to provide collegial support to those working within the profession, sustaining her commitment to early childhood education.

Rachel's participation in leadership and professional roles outside the classroom also contribute to her professional commitment, including her involvement with a professional association:

> Being on things like the ECTA committee, I found that was very sustaining. And you are in a professional group, having professional dialogue. And it wasn't… We used to go to a network meeting that was running around the area, but it was all based on a very superficial level. The people just wanted little crafty ideas for table-top activities and stuff, which we didn't feel was what we wanted. So we started our own network meeting of professional dialogue, having speakers come and stuff like that. So, just keeping up with what's going on. (Rachel, Interview#4, 2/7/04, p. 44).

In her role as Level 3 teacher, Rachel belongs to school-based committees and is involved in decision-making processes within the school, further sustaining her commitment to teaching.

Having a strong belief in early childhood education has sustained Rachel's commitment to early childhood education, leading her to engage in opportunities that extend her knowledge of early childhood education. Practices include participating in academic study, professional reading, professional associations and discourse with a mentor within the profession. Rachel's professional commitment has also been sustained from not only receiving collegial support, but through extending that same support to others within the early childhood profession.

Rachel's Job Satisfaction

Rachel stated:

> Job satisfaction is seeing what you believe in actually happening. I mean I love teaching kids. I love seeing them learn through play, and just listening to what they say. And knowing that it's the little tiny steps that we get excited about, and that really are a satisfaction, and not the big huge steps from where they're coming and generally where they're going, if ever (sic). Just the little things they do. (Rachel, Interview#4, 2/7/04, p. 45).

In addition Rachel stated:

> I love the kids and I love coming to work everyday. And that's why I'm a Level 3 classroom teacher and I don't intend to go into Admin., because I really do love the kids. I really love the incidental learning that happens on a daily basis. I guess I'm lucky that I can do something like that. That I can do something I really enjoy. (Rachel, Interview#2,18/6/04, p. 27).

Daily interaction with children and observation of students' growth and development sustains Rachel's enthusiasm for her work. Rachel recounted two recent incidents reinforcing her job satisfaction. In the first, the children dressed up in animal costumes then explained to teachers in nearby classrooms that they were

really children pretending to be animals, exemplifying an innocence Rachel finds appealing. In the second incident a child with limited oral language was able to complete a given task and provide oral feedback, rewarding Rachel for her teaching efforts.

Having the autonomy to implement preferred approaches further sustains Rachel's job satisfaction. Rachel stated, "I'm lucky here, in that I think that early childhood teachers are not that directed. They tend to be left to do what they want to do" (Rachel, Interview#2, 18/6/04, p. 24). Freedom from close monitoring or enforced practices has allowed Rachel to deliberately structure her classroom and teaching program according to her own educational beliefs. Autonomy and flexibility in practice are key factors impacting on Rachel's job satisfaction.

International recognition of her qualifications and the ability to work in different teaching locations, education systems and countries also contributes to Rachel's job satisfaction. In reflecting on her diverse teaching career Rachel commented, "I've just enjoyed everything I've done" (Rachel, Interview#2, 18/6/04, p. 30).

Rachel's prime source of job satisfaction is her daily interactions with her students, receiving intrinsic rewards through observing their growth and development. Autonomy, diversity of teaching experiences and recognition of teaching qualifications also contribute to sustaining Rachel's job satisfaction.

Rachel's Occupational Motivation

When describing her *occupational motivation* Rachel stated:

> My motivation is probably just the kids. It doesn't matter where I've taught I've always found the kids make the difference. I just love listening to them, talking to them, seeing them make those steps that are so important. (Interview#4, 2/7/04, p. 45).

Working with young children sustains both Rachel's job satisfaction and occupational motivation. From the commencement of her teaching career it was not money that motivated Rachel to teach, as the wages were poor, it was her enjoyment of working with young children. Rachel realistically acknowledges, "I suppose

earning a wage is a bit of a motivation, but I think I'd probably still do it anyway." (Rachel, Interview#4, 2/7/04, p. 45).

A passionate commitment and belief in early childhood education underlines Rachel's motivation to stay in teaching:

> I think it's hard to actually pin it down to anything, but I think the strong beliefs and the strong personality are what keep me going. Just looking at other people, and how they perhaps don't cope as well: it's the people who don't have the strong belief in what they're doing, or really don't understand what they're doing. And the people who aren't flexible, so I guess those are the sorts of things that keep me going. (Rachel, Interview#5, 9/7/04, p. 59).

Rachel sustains her motivation and convictions through professional reading and engaging in professional discourse, benefiting from her involvement with ECTA and being on numerous committees related to early childhood education.

Working at a large school, where a group of early childhood teachers are employed, also contributes to Rachel's occupational motivation. Sharing ideas and collaborating with like-minded people stimulates Rachel's thinking and reinforces her affiliation to the early childhood profession. Further to this, Rachel's close association with one particular teacher, Lee, has proved motivational:

> I think having Lee, as a close colleague, thinking the same way and being able to do a lot of collaboration with her, has sustained both of us here. Because we've often said, that you have to have somebody in the school you can talk to. (Rachel, Interview#4, 2/7/04, p. 42).

With support of a professional mentor Rachel is inspired to continually read current research in early childhood education, to refine her teaching practice and to extend herself as a teacher.

The ability to work in different locations and be exposed to change also acts as a source of motivation. Rachel reflected that if she stays too long in a place, such as in her present school where expectations and competitive spirit are high, it undermines her enthusiasm for teaching:

> I have actually withdrawn into this classroom quite a bit this year, in that I don't want to be part of the back-biting and the school politics and the stuff that goes on. Because I find it drains me… I need to go somewhere else and I need a fresh challenge. (Rachel, Interview#2, 18/6/04, p. 27).

Rachel's self-awareness has contributed to her constantly looking forward, seeking challenges and change in her chosen career.

Rachel has been motivated to stay in teaching and develop her teaching practice through her love of her students and the belief that early childhood education is a worthwhile profession. Accessing educational literature and engaging in professional collaboration and discourse, both in and out of the school, has motivated Rachel to extend herself as a teacher. Rachel has also found that change and new challenges renew her motivation to continue working in the teaching profession.

Rachel's Effective Teaching Practices

Rachel stated:

> I guess the way I look at it, at effective teaching practices, now is to make sure I cover the seven principles of the Curriculum Framework. Teaching and learning, learning and teaching, in that I try to make the teaching meaningful to the kids. And I found that, especially with kindergarten kids, that there's no point in trying to get them to do something they don't want to do, so you have to be very manipulative, in that you have to get them to do the things you want them to do with the resources they're using. Rather than saying to them that they have to come to you and do something. But I think effective teaching means using a range of flexible teaching strategies. (Rachel, Interview#4, 2/7/04, p. 45).

Rachel's educational beliefs first developed as a parent in Denmark, Europe, where firsthand observations left her with the impression "their community kindergartens are the best in the world" (Rachel, Interview#1, 11/6/04, p. 5). Subsequent training in the Play Best Approach of learning through play, and constructivist strategies: scaffolding learning through play, based on children's interests and the use of stimulating learning environments, has enabled Rachel to develop a strong foundation on which to base her teaching practices, stating "I'm confident in what I believe and I believe I'm confident in following what I believe" (Rachel, Interview#5, 9/7/04, p. 54).

Willing to be a reflective learner, Rachel has undertaken studies in early childhood education and reads educational literature to extend her pedagogical knowledge. Rachel prefers reading reference material and accessing the Internet to

attending professional development sessions as many are irrelevant to her needs, whereas quality books provide in-depth information she can readily access. Involvement with a professional association also impacts on Rachel's learning, exposing her to the ideas of experts in the field and allowing her to engage in discourse with her professional peers.

The support offered by Lee, a teaching colleague at the same school, has also contributed to Rachel's teaching pedagogy:

> It was just that we had the same philosophies, the same ideas and she's the same sort of person, that's interested in education. She reads a lot. We discuss a lot and together we've developed our ideas. And I think that if maybe if I hadn't had Lee here I would still have developed what I'm doing, but not at such a pace. And I don't think either of us would have gone into doing teacher workshops, if it hadn't been for the fact that we were both doing it together, and bouncing off each other. And, we've often said to other teachers that come here, you need to have at least one person in the school where you can go and let off steam! (Rachel, Interview#4, 2/7/04, p. 42).

Having a mentor within the school environment has lead Rachel to extend herself as a teacher and implement innovative teaching strategies in the classroom.

Rachel's knowledge of her students and their interests also contributes to her effectiveness as a teacher. At the start of the school year Rachel observes her students at play and engages them in dialogue to determine their interests and levels of understanding. This practice allows Rachel to broadly define topics of interest, in the form of mind maps, and develop potential activities. These documents direct Rachel's teaching and also demonstrate accountability to the students' parents, informing them of what learning is taking place in the classroom.

In addition, resources, varied and readily available, are essential to sustaining Rachel's teaching practice, "a vital part of running the program" (Rachel, Interview#3, 25/6/04, p. 37). Over the years, Rachel has accumulated a range of manipulative materials, many consumable or self-made, to stimulate students' interest. Rachel continually anticipates her students' thinking and acquires the necessary resources to initiate inquiry learning and child-centred investigations, sustaining her effectiveness as an early childhood teacher.

Strong early childhood pedagogical beliefs underlines Rachel's teaching practice, sustained through professional reading and attending early childhood functions. Dialogue with a professional mentor affirms Rachel's ideas and beliefs, leading Rachel to trial innovative practices. Skilled observation and questioning of her students allows Rachel to identify children's interests and levels of understanding, to provide appropriate resources and sustain her effective teaching practice in the classroom.

Rachel's Coping with the Daily Demands of Teaching

Rachel prioritizes tasks according to their relevance to her teaching. A strong knowledge of early childhood pedagogy enables Rachel to be reflective, identifying what is important to her teaching and students' learning, to be selective and to rationalise her workload. Rachel stated:

> I used to get in a flap about everything that had to be done and doing it. And I'd stay late and do extra stuff. And now I think: I'll do what I can, I'll do the important things. (Rachel, Interview#4, 2/7/04, p. 46).

One particular strategy Rachel employs is to limit tasks that are time consuming, in particular the amount of paperwork she is prepared to do:

> I think, the thing is (sic), that I don't write that much down. I have a program, and I have a broad based plan, and I know where I'm going in the big picture, but I don't write Daily Work Pads. (Rachel, Interview#4, 2.7.04, p. 47).

Using Student Progress Maps and mind maps Rachel develops a broad plan for teaching and takes digital photographs for accountability purposes, finding " the photos help me to actually recall what the kids do" (Rachel, Interview#2, 18/6/04, p.21). Tasks not directly related to classroom teaching are often put aside until required, allowing Rachel to focus on time spent with her students.

Rachel is flexible in her daily practice stating, "I go with the flow with the kids. I am not a routine person" (Rachel, Interview#2, 18/6/04, p. 19). Rachel arrives at school prior to students' arrival to prepare the learning environment and have time to reflect on what children have said and done, anticipating what might arise during the day. Being prepared within herself helps Rachel cope with each teaching day:

> So I guess its being just mentally prepared to actually be flexible.

> Because the minute you start to think I must go and do that and that plan and this work, that's when the stress kicks in. (Rachel, Interview#4, 2/7/04, p. 47).

Having a range of resources readily available also sustains Rachel's ability to be flexible. Although accumulating suitable materials can be time consuming, Rachel finds her preparation time is minimised as she encourages children to develop their own ideas and activities, based on the available resources.

Implementing a team approach to teaching and sharing responsibilities related to the students, with her education assistant, also allows Rachel to cope with her teaching responsibilities:

> We have a good time. And that's why I like, and I think early childhood is sustaining as well, is because you have a relationship with an assistant. You've got somebody there with you all the time. (Rachel, Interview#4, 2/7/04, p. 51-52).

Rachel fosters a close working relationship with her education assistant, explaining the rationale behind her actions and involving the education assistant in observing and interacting with the students.

In her daily practice Rachel employs a range of strategies that allow her to concentrate on her teaching role, devoting her teaching time to her students. While parents are not rostered on as helpers, they are encouraged to stay for 15 minutes at the start of the day, as Rachel prefers to encourage students to be independent and cooperative, sharing class tasks. Rachel operates an informal routine, within a flexible timeframe, involving children in a range of inquiry-based activities.

Through experience Rachel has learnt to adjust her teaching and expectations according to her energy levels and emotional well-being. When necessary Rachel draws on her education assistant's support to increase her involvement in daily practices. In more recent years Rachel has also developed the habit of leaving school as soon as her teaching duties finish, disassociating from the stresses of the day. Sometimes she will stay and talk about teaching with her in-school mentor, Lee, but prefers time away from the school environment to reflect on positives outcomes arising from her teaching. This action allows Rachel to maintain her professional focus and motivation.

To be sustained in her daily teaching practice Rachel states “you need to have a strong belief in what you’re doing” (Rachel, Interview#1, 11/6/04, p. 9). Rachel has applied this belief to not only developing effective teaching practices but also to coping with the daily demands of her work. Rachel rationalises and prioritises teaching responsibilities, being selective and constructing ways that she can best adhere to her beliefs. For Rachel this means being flexible in her planning, accessing and utilizing quality resources and developing a collaborative team approach with her education assistant. Flexible classroom routines, encouraging independent learning and limiting parental involvement are other strategies Rachel employs. In being a reflective thinker and allowing times for mental unwinding and restoration, Rachel is sustained in her ability to develop stimulating learning environments that engage her students in meaningful activities, while coping with the daily demands of teaching.

Rachel’s Coping with Educational Change

Rachel referred to *educational change* as “keeping up with what’s going on, and changing whatever needs to be changed to ensure you’re covering it (sic)” (Rachel, Interview#4, 2/7/04, p. 47). When discussing how teachers, in general, cope with educational change Rachel also commented:

> Changing teachers is one of the hardest jobs because I think a lot of teachers don’t think beyond what they do and what they’ve always done. And I think being a reflective teacher is what people have to do to change… so you definitely need to be a reflective teacher, to look at new ideas and be open to new ideas. You can reject them, if you feel that they don’t fit your philosophy. (Rachel, Interview#4, 2/7/04, p. 47).

Adhering to these beliefs, Rachel is proactive finding out what is happening locally, nationally and overseas, then reflecting on, and applying this knowledge to her own teaching practice.

Attending professional meetings and conferences, such as those offered by ECTA provides opportunities for professional discourse. Rachel also reads educational literature and accesses credible sources on the Internet to gather relevant information on current trends. As part of her duties as a Level 3 Teacher Rachel has been involved in meetings and professional development sessions regarding the

DET Strategic Plan for the next five years and the changes to be implemented at a school level. These sources provided Rachel with a bank of information to draw on.

Using acquired knowledge, Rachel reflects on how changes relate to her own teaching beliefs and pedagogy. Rachel also engages in professional dialogue, sharing and clarifying ideas with her mentor, Lee, and in discussion groups within the School. A strong grounding in early childhood pedagogy provides Rachel with a basis on which to construct and reconstruct her knowledge. Engaging in professional discourse allows Rachel to test how this knowledge could be best put into practice.

Throughout her teaching career Rachel has enjoyed the challenge of change: moving to different countries and educational systems, changing schools and teaching different year levels. To cope with differing work environments Rachel has learnt to accept the inevitability of change. Through being informed, involved and collaborative, as well as reflective, Rachel is positive and proactive, rationalizing educational changes to incorporate them into her teaching practice.

Rachel's Critical Experiences in Sustainment

When asked what critical experiences impacted on her sustainment in teaching Rachel responded:

> I still think the main thing keeps me going is the kids. I don't think it's any one person. It's on a daily basis, when one kid does something that is so tiny that you celebrate it… Especially with the younger kids, I think. You see those flashes of, you know (sic), the things that they say and do. (Rachel, Interview#4, 2/7/04, p. 50).

To stay in teaching Rachel perceived that you had to like working with children, in particular young children, and she did: "I just love the innocence of young kids. They just keep you going" (Rachel, Interview#4, 2/7/04, p. 50).

Rachel did admit that in the second year at her current school she underwent an experience that impacted on her sustainment as a teacher. Teaching year one students for the first time, in a new education system and working alongside unfamiliar colleagues with no education assistant, Rachel faced a mental struggle over what needed to be done. Rachel admitted, "I found that hard because I wasn't confident with what I was doing, because it was new to me, but I knew I had to do

it" (Rachel, Interview# 4, 2/7/04, p. 51). In addition, Rachel was placed in the classroom next to a traditional-styled teacher, which led to comparisons being made by some parents and colleagues. As Rachel was looping, teaching the children she had taught the previous year, most parents were familiar with her teaching methods and supportive of her teaching efforts.

During this time Rachel developed a friendship with Lee, one of the other four Year One teachers at the School. This professional relationship provided Rachel with affirmation that what she was doing was educationally valid. Sharing an interest in educational practice and a passion for reading educational literature Rachel and Lee supported each other in their teaching, collaborating to team teach and implement practices they considered constituted best practice in early childhood education. As a result of their collaboration Rachel and Lee developed innovative teaching practices and offered professional development to other early childhood practitioners, sustaining their commitment to teaching.

Although others within the School do not always support Rachel and Lee's efforts, with both now teaching different year levels and in different parts of the school, this has not deterred Rachel from continuing to implement what she considers is effective teaching strategies. Rachel's strong self-efficacy continues to sustain her commitment to early childhood education.

Another recent event, outside of her professional life, has also contributed to Rachel reassessing her career path:

> Last year, one of my really good friends died of cancer, really suddenly. And that sort of really pulled me up as well. Because I think, well, what's the point? She was an absolutely dedicated kind of teacher. She loved her job. She was brilliant. And she's gone, and I think of all the dreams that we had, that she was going to do. And I think I don't want to be in that position, where there are still things that I want to do, and I'm not going to get there. (sic) (Rachel, Interview#2, 18/6/04, p. 29).

These experiences have contributed to Rachel thinking more of what "I need as a person" (Rachel, Interview#2, 18/6/04, p. 29).

Critical experiences have contributed to Rachel assessing what is important in her life, both personally and professionally. Having a professional mentor has

given Rachel the affirmation she required at a time when her self-confidence was low, empowering Rachel to extend herself as a teacher, teaching not only her students, but also others within the profession. Rachel's enjoyment of working with young children and her strength of commitment to early childhood education, continues to sustain Rachel in her teaching practice.

Rachel's Summary

In Rachel's teaching career she has always enjoyed working with young children. In observing their actions, words and small steps of achievement Rachel has gained job satisfaction, and is motivated to continue in her chosen profession. Interactions with her students also enable Rachel to focus on what is important to her teaching, her students, helping to place the daily stresses related to her work into perspective.

Rachel's strength of conviction in quality early childhood education has also been a major factor sustaining her professional commitment, occupational motivation and willingness to implement effective teaching practices in her classroom. Intrinsically motivated, Rachel has continued to study, read professional literature, engage in professional dialogue with her colleagues and be actively involved in professional bodies that promote early childhood education. This strong commitment to her profession has also lead Rachel to share her innovative teaching practices with other early childhood educators.

Having an in-school collaborator and mentor has sustained Rachel's professional commitment and strengthened her self-efficacy, providing the encouragement to put her beliefs into practice. Collaboration and teamwork have contributed to Rachel implementing and sustaining a child-centred, play-based approach to learning which incorporates the use of stimulating, flexible learning environments.

Rachel's effective teaching practice also relies on her closely observing and questioning her students, providing a range of resources to stimulate their interest and development. Through being aware of how children learn, knowing her

students' levels of understanding and having appropriate resources available Rachel sustains effective teaching practice in the classroom.

Prioritizing tasks, doing what she can when she can allows Rachel to cope with the daily demands of teaching. Utilizing a child-centred approach to learning provides Rachel with freedom and flexibility in her teaching practice. Minimizing non-essential planning and preparation time enables Rachel to devote more time to doing what she enjoys most: spending time with her students. More recently Rachel has learnt to take time for herself and develop opportunities where she can engage in reflective thinking, to understand and enact on theoretical perspectives relating to her pedagogical beliefs, and be sustained in her daily practice.

Reflective practice also applies to Rachel's coping with educational change. A strong grounding in early childhood educational pedagogy provides a basis on which Rachel can reflect and rationalise educational changes taking place. Keeping informed through accessing various sources and engaging in professional discourse leads Rachel to being selective, implementing changes she considers are important to students' learning and development.

Though Rachel's sustainment in early childhood education has been driven by her empathy for young children, it is Rachel's strength of conviction in early childhood education that has lead her to access information and implement practices that will provide quality education for her students. Following her beliefs and rationalizing her teaching practices have contributed to Rachel's sustainment in the profession and in her daily teaching.

Case Study Four: Grace

Description of the Location

The five interviews with the fourth case study, Grace (pseudonym), took place each fortnight in her classroom, after the school day had ended. Grace's classroom was one of several in a 1950's linear-designed school, sharing a common covered breeze-way. Originally part of the primary school, Grace's room was modified to include a child-sized ablution block and preparation area. Children's work was displayed throughout the room, with teacher-made labels disclosing what learning had taken place. The furniture was age-appropriate and arranged in groups of tables with a designated carpet area for group mat sessions.

Interviews were preceded by informal discussion until the EA departed. Each taped interview took place at a student table and lasted approximately 50 minutes. Sessions were frequently interrupted by Grace's teaching colleagues wishing to discuss school organizational details. During these times recording was paused and recommenced when they had left the room.

Grace's Teaching Background

Grace is a teacher in her late 40's who has taught early childhood students for over 23 years. Originally primary-trained Grace completed a Diploma of Teaching in 1976, then a Bachelor of Education in 1980. At the time of the interviews Grace was in the process of completing a post-graduate course, a Graduate Certificate in Early Childhood Studies.

During her teaching career Grace has taught at four government metropolitan schools. First teaching year one students for 5 years, Grace then taught year three students for 2½ years at a second school before taking a 6 year break. Grace returned to teaching in a part-time capacity at a third school, working as a Junior Primary Literacy Support Teacher for 2 ½ years. Taking a further 2 year break, Grace resumed her position for another year before teaching 2 years in a tandem situation, sharing a class with another teacher, at the School's Education Support Unit. Grace then transferred to her present school where she has worked in a fulltime capacity for the past 8 years and currently teaches a pre-primary and year one (P/1) class.

Further to this, Grace was granted Senior Teacher status, a DET promotional position, in 1999 and acted as Deputy Principal that year. Grace has also been the School's Literacy Coordinator and K to 3 Team Leader for several years and continues to be responsible for curriculum development in those areas.

Grace's Professional Commitment

Grace considers *professional commitment* as;

> Being committed to my profession. That means being prepared when I come into the class. When I come into the class I can give the children an enriched learning environment. Professional commitment also means that I keep updated with what's happening in current education, current knowledge, with new ideas, with current research about the way children earn, so that I can modify or even change my teaching styles. Being committed to the profession- mainly being fully planned, working with others, being cooperative with others. (Grace, Interview#4, 30/8/04, p. 58).

To fulfil this belief Grace plans in advance for her day's teaching, keeps informed of current practice and is prepared to collaborate and modify her teaching practices to educate her students.

Part of Grace's professional commitment is her belief in the value of early childhood education:

> I see it as a career, as a profession and I think we need to maintain that, especially in early childhood education. We're not just looking after them (the students). I'm very much into developing and the Outcomes, developing the children's domains. (Grace, Interview#3, 16/8/04, p. 39).

This belief leads Grace to undertake further studies and attend professional development sessions to expand her knowledge of early childhood pedagogy. As part of her studies Grace has read widely, to be informed on what constitutes quality early childhood practice. The experience of teaching has already taught Grace many of the strategies, but reading provides Grace with a deeper understanding of how pedagogical practices relate to child development.

Being organised and prepared for teaching also sustains Grace's professional commitment. In her first years of teaching Grace wrote detailed notes, which she followed verbatim. Years of teaching experience has embedded this knowledge in Grace's practice, reducing the need to write in detail:

> I would imagine it has been experience that has made me change my planning, because I just know now. I know roughly what a child needs to be able to do at the end of Year One. I know roughly what a child, what their standard should be. (Grace, Interview#2, 9/8/04, p. 20-21).

Weekly Overviews, mind-maps and conferring with her education assistant facilitates Grace's planning and preparation, allowing her to focus on the students during school hours and sustain her professional commitment to teaching.

Collaborating with teaching colleagues also sustains Grace's professional commitment. In her first years of teaching Grace worked in a cluster setting, benefiting from the experience of two teachers she worked alongside, appreciating their offers of advice and sharing of documentation. Grace's first Deputy Principal also provided practical pedagogical knowledge, which expanded Grace's knowledge of children and teaching. In her role as Literacy Support Teacher, Grace collaborated and offered support to professional colleagues. While tandem-teaching in an Education Support Unit, having a colleague to share ideas with and plan together also contributed to sustaining Grace's professional focus and commitment.

At her current school Grace has continued to value interaction with other teachers:

> A lot of it is to do with being with colleagues and when we get together. The lunchtime chat I suppose… Informal chat. Like we were sitting today at lunchtime and we were talking about… the brain research. So informal chat and keeping up with what's current, what's happening. (Grace, Interview#4, 30/8/04, p. 58).

Grace's roles as Literacy Coordinator and K to 3 Team Leader also require her to collaborate, informing others of new ideas. "Everyone needs some guidance" (Grace, Interview#5, 13/9/04, p. 77) and if Grace can help her colleagues or pre-service teachers, she does. This approach enhances Grace's commitment to teaching as well as others within the profession.

Being prepared, informed and working collaboratively sustains Grace's professional commitment to teaching. The experience of teaching has taught Grace to be proactive in her planning, to reflect and evolve strategies to achieve outcomes for her students. Professional reading and attending professional development sessions allows Grace to be informed of trends within the teaching profession.

Collaboration with others enables Grace to share information and decisions regarding the education of students. These strategies sustain Grace's professional commitment to teaching.

Grace's Job Satisfaction

When discussing job satisfaction Grace commented, "Hard work doesn't worry me at all, as long as you're doing what you're enjoying" (Grace, Interview#1, 5/8/04, p. 6).

From the onset of her teaching career Grace knew teaching involved hard work, having observed the time her sister devoted to preparation in her role as a primary school teacher. However, Grace was competent in her own abilities and enjoyed her initial experiences in working with children, a feeling that has continued throughout her teaching career.

Grace's students are a prime factor sustaining her job satisfaction:

> As soon as you walk in the room, all your worries leave you behind. It's just the joy, the honesty of working with them, with young children. What they say, the humour, the fun, the laughter they give you. And even though you don't laugh in front of them at what they say, it's inside, there's a belly laugh. You'd like to put your head in the cupboard, from some of the things they say. I really should write it down. But that's the joy of all that. It's being with the children. They make it all worthwhile when you do things with them. The enjoyment of what they get from what you've prepared for them. (Grace, Interview#4, 30/8/04, p. 61).

Being able to practice what she believes in has further contributed to Grace's job satisfaction. The experience of teaching a pre-primary and year one class has been particularly rewarding:

> Within the first few weeks I absolutely adored what I was doing. I'm a great believer in children developing at their own rate, not putting on pressure, not putting on stress. (Grace, Interview#2, 9/8/04, p. 18).

Having autonomy in teaching practice, such as implementing cooperative learning strategies has proved rewarding for Grace. The early childhood setting has also been conducive to Grace applying deeper thinking teaching strategies, such as Edward DeBono's Thinking Hats. These experiences have proved rewarding not only for her students, but contribute to Grace's enjoyment of teaching.

Another factor sustaining Grace's job satisfaction is working within a social setting:

> I like being an organiser. I've sort of set up netball teams. Being in a team and being with people. I couldn't go for a walk on my own. I wouldn't find enjoyment in that… I'm seen as a leader within the school in a role, and perhaps because I'm organising and doing things. (Grace, Interview#2, 9/8/04, p. 30).

In her teaching career Grace has taken on roles which required her to liaise and collaborate with teaching colleagues, including teaching in a cluster setting, working as a Literacy Support teacher and in a tandem situation. At her present school Grace acts as Literacy Coordinator and K to 3 Team Leader allowing her to engage in dialogue with her peers and assist where possible; tasks Grace finds are more fulfilling than compliments she receives from her students' parents. Working in an early childhood setting, where an education assistant is present, further contributes to Grace's enjoyment of her teaching role.

Grace has found teaching to be a rewarding profession where she enjoys working with children and work colleagues. In her teaching career Grace has gained satisfaction from using her organizational skills in situations where they can be of most benefit, not just in the classroom but also in collaborative roles. Grace has also enjoyed the autonomy of early childhood settings, being able to put her own beliefs into practice. Adherence to teaching beliefs and working with others sustains Grace's job satisfaction.

Grace's Occupational Motivation

Exposure to new ideas, challenges and change sustains Grace's occupational motivation:

> Staying motivated, I need change. If I'm doing something, like I've got all these files over there (pointing to a cupboard), year after year. About all these things (sic), and I think maybe I'll go back and use them again, but I never tend to go back. I keep creating new things all the time to work with the children. Looking for new ideas of what to do. I try to change. (Grace, Interview#4, 30/8/04, p. 62).

Variety in pedagogical practice, location and work roles maintains Grace's interest in teaching.

When Grace first commenced teaching it was the challenge of doing something for the first time. After 5 years at the same school Grace requested a transfer to experience a new challenge:

> After the 5 years the mothers came up with their babies in their prams and said you'll be teaching this one. I thought- Right, I've got to have a change, because it was like I'd been stamped and labelled to be there forever. And I thought- No, I need to get away and have a change now...I needed to experience children with learning difficulties and the range. (Grace, Interview#1, 5/8/04, p. 7).

Subsequent teaching appointments have provided different challenges, including student diversity, as well as a range of teaching roles and work environments, each factor sustaining Grace's occupational motivation.

Aware that teaching can become monotonous or routine, Grace maintains motivation by deliberately seeking:

> What I find is interesting and motivational because a lot of what you give to children affects them by teacher attitude as well. Because, really, the teacher is the role model within the classroom! (Grace, Interview#2, p.20, 9/8/04, p. 32).

Grace reads educational literature for new ideas to stimulate her thinking, direct her teaching and benefit her students. Currently it is the implementation of cooperative learning strategies that maintains Grace's interest in teaching.

Grace also finds daily interactions with her students are an ongoing source of motivation:

> It's definitely not the pay that's keeping me going. It really becomes love of the job. The love of the children, that's really what keeps you going. They always lift your spirits all the time, and you take great joy in what they have to say. They're open and honest. (Grace, Interview#3, 16/8/04, p. 39).

Enjoyment of the company of her students provides Grace not only with job satisfaction, but motivates Grace to continue teaching in the classroom.

Another factor contributing to Grace's occupational motivation is the compatibility of teaching to Grace's lifestyle and her ability to maintain a life-work balance. Teaching suits Grace as a mother and as a parent. In raising a young family

Grace was able to take Accouchement Leave twice (now known as Parental Leave), and return to teaching in a part-time capacity, negotiating hours to suit her personal commitments. Work hours, regular holiday breaks and long service leave entitlements are conducive to Grace's family life. Teaching placements have allowed Grace to pursue personal sporting interests, to balance both work and family commitments and to develop long-term friendships with teaching colleagues.

The challenge of working in different teaching roles and locations and being stimulated by new ideas contributes to Grace maintaining her enthusiasm for teaching. In Grace's own words, "You change all the time. But if I don't change I think I would go crazy!" (Grace, Interview#2, 9/8/04, p. 18).The enjoyment of working with young children in a profession which is suited to her lifestyle, sustains Grace's occupational motivation.

Grace's Effective Teaching Practices

While Grace did not define her understanding of effective teaching practices, she did state "Everything I do I tend to do for a purpose" (Grace, Interview#2, 9/8/04, p. 29). Furthermore, when discussing her own teaching abilities, in relation to being a good teacher, Grace stated:

> I try my best to be (a good teacher). When you reflect on your day or your week, these last few weeks you think- goodness me, we haven't done very much! But then you sit down and reflect with the children what you've actually covered over a couple of weeks, we have covered a lot. You go through guilt sessions, now and again, thinking I'm not working hard enough, or I'm not doing this or I'm not doing that. But overall… you sort of get another burst and go again! I hope I'm a good teacher. I have been accredited as a good teacher. (Grace, Interview#4, 30/8/04, p. 64-5).

Engaging in reflective practice, accompanied by teaching experience and an openness to change, sustains Grace's effective teaching practice in the classroom.

The experience of teaching has contributed to Grace's current teaching practices. In her first years of teaching Grace benefited from observing and working with two experienced junior primary teachers. Following their example, Grace learnt to be organized, plan a developmentally-based program, establish learning centres and promote the use of oral language. Years later, these teaching strategies were reaffirmed as effective practice when Grace attended professional development

sessions on First Steps, a government sponsored initiative outlining child development and quality teaching pedagogy.

In her second school Grace found “I had to change my teaching styles to cater for the different type of learners I was facing in the School” (Grace, Interview#1, 5/8/04, p. 7). This led to Grace becoming aware of children’s learning styles and implementing a “hands on,” resource-based approach to teaching. Teaching in an Education Support Unit required Grace to learn about children with learning and intellectual disabilities. Grace valued attending professional development sessions and network meetings, sharing practical advice and ideas with professional colleagues. At her current school Grace’s teaching pedagogy has continued to evolve, changing strategies in order to stay motivated in teaching and to deliver quality education for her students.

A lifelong learner, Grace reads educational literature to be informed of effective teaching practices. As a newly graduated teacher Grace read each night to determine how to teach her students to read. Undertaking further studies required Grace to access quality literature on educational philosophy. At Grace’s current school her line managers have encouraged Grace to read articles on cooperative learning and higher order thinking and to attend professional development sessions related to these strategies. The information Grace gains from these experiences often confirms what she already has learnt from her teaching experiences, but deepens her understanding of children and why they have certain behaviours.

Personal experiences have also impacted on Grace’s teaching pedagogy. Having her own children has strengthened Grace’s knowledge of children and teaching:

> After having children, even though I’d read about theories and Piaget and child development, it’s not really until you have your own children that you understand that…When you have them and watch them grow, a day-to-day basis, when you’re with them all the time, and the way they learn and what they do. You develop that embedded understanding of child development. (Grace, Interview#4, 30/8/04, p. 60).

An in-depth knowledge of child development allows Grace to accommodate students’ needs, such as being aware that noise is an integral part of children’s oral

language development. Her own upbringing, in a strong moralistic and supportive family, has also contributed to Grace appreciating values-based education, patience and tolerance: factors that impact on her ability to sustain effective teaching practice in the classroom.

Reflective thinking also sustains Grace's teaching practice, allowing her to relate acquired knowledge to practical applications:

> You always need to constantly self-reflect on what you're doing, otherwise you won't improve or change anything that you're doing. Very important to look at what you're doing, the purpose of what you're doing, what the children are learning, how I could have done it better. From that I think you get more motivating and become a bit more of a creative teacher. (Grace, Interview# 5, 13/9/04, p. 93).

Knowledge of child development, a strong moral background and reading of educational literature, allows Grace to reflect on what will benefit her students and implement a learning program to cater for "the healthy well-rounded whole (sic), developing the whole person" (Grace, Interview#4, 30/8/04, p. 64).

For Grace, her effective teaching practices have evolved through life experiences and being open to change. It is also through accessing information, particularly in the form of educational literature and professional development sessions that Grace has enriched her teaching pedagogy. Reflective thinking and a strong understanding of child development allows Grace to make judgements about acquired knowledge and the benefits for her students. These strategies sustain Grace's effective teaching practice in the classroom.

Grace's Coping with the Daily Demands of Teaching

To cope with the daily demands associated with teaching Grace stated:

> I need to be organised and ready. Like, at home I'm up in the morning and I'll get things ready for school. I have a set time for everything…A routine to get everything done. And then, because everything's done, perhaps that why I don't get so, as my principal says: you never look stressed! (Grace, Interview#4, 30/8/04, p. 67-68).

Grace has learnt to plan ahead, identifying what she wants to achieve then developing routines and strategies to put her goals into practice; pacing herself so she is sustained in her teaching practice.

Organisation and preparation are critical to Grace's sustainment. Grace writes down her thoughts to clarify teaching objectives and how she intends to reach them. To streamline her planning Grace uses cross-curricula integration of the learning areas. Teaching objectives and ideas mapped out on paper, allow Grace to mentally prepare for each day's challenges. Being an early riser Grace completes work-related tasks at home, in the early morning hours and arrives at school at 7.40am, to organize the room and prepare activities prior to the students' arrival.

Having another person in the room, an education assistant, also allows Grace to share tasks that distract her from her teaching role. These include collecting money, cleaning equipment and changing reading resources. Although Grace prepares student tasks and worksheets herself, she values input from her education assistant and encourages a team approach to teaching, including monitoring of students at set tasks. Grace finds that having an adult in the classroom also provides opportunities for shared laughter and informal talk, both potential stress-alleviators.

Perceiving herself to be a systematic person, "My whole life really is a timetable, a systematic timetable" (Grace, Interview#3, 16/8/04, p. 57), routines are important to Grace, enabling her to cope on a daily basis and achieve planned objectives. Commencing with quiet shared reading, followed by a mat session then an activity session provides a low-key start to each day. Extended periods of outdoor play allows students to expend their energies so that afternoon activity sessions are quiet and at a slower pace. This routine affords Grace flexibility in time scheduling, changing tasks according to the students' interest or energy levels.

In recent years Grace's teaching has also centred on cooperative learning amongst the students, where children are encouraged to help each other in group settings. This approach shares the teaching load, allowing Grace more time to work with different groups of children to develop their learning. Looping, teaching the same children for consecutive years, has also changed Grace's teaching role:

> They are role models…They talk about the environment as the third teacher (sic). I suppose we could talk about those older children in that age group, as the third teacher as well, if you take them on that line. Because they're very, very helpful. (Grace, Interview#3, 16/8/04, p. 46).

Working collaboratively with her students and EA, makes Grace's work day progress smoothly.

Grace has also found self awareness and prioritizing what is important in her life, maintains her life-work balance, sustaining her continuance in teaching. While her children were young Grace was able to continue teaching by working part-time. In Grace's current school the close proximity to her residence allows her more time to balance work and family commitments. Outside of school hours Grace enjoys spending time with her family and is often involved in recreational sport on the weekends. Gardening, as well as sport provide a physical release. During her time teaching at an Education Support Unit, Grace would often come home and dig in the garden or mow the lawn. This enabled her to unwind and get a good night's sleep, then face the next day's challenges.

Having regular holidays is another factor that contributes to Grace's ability to cope with her teaching commitments. During the school term Grace paces herself and works to deadlines. It is during school holidays that Grace relaxes and does not follow a routine, taking time to engage in social dialogue with friends, to travel or read a book.

Grace has also found that she has been able to cope with the demands associated with teaching through knowing herself, and her limitations;

> Sometimes it's a very hard demanding job and you get very, very tired. But sometimes you have to stop and say no, stop, you have to be patient. So you've really got to have that inner voice. (Grace, Interview#4, 30/8/04, p. 61).

After 5 years at her first school Grace needed a new challenge, so transferred to a different school, a process she has since repeated to regenerate her interest in teaching. Grace is also aware that her emotional health impacts on her teaching performance. With the recent death of her mother, Grace knew she wasn't coping emotionally, feeling tired and unenthused, so took time off work to engage in reflective thinking and work through the grieving process. Self-reflection, accompanied by quiet music and periods of silence, particularly in the early morning hours, has enabled Grace to remain focussed on her teaching.

Grace has coped with the daily demands of teaching through reflective thinking, developing self-awareness and prioritising what is important in her life and to her teaching. Planning in advance, developing routines, involving the education assistant in daily practice and encouraging a cooperative learning environment are strategies employed within the classroom. Grace is aware of her own limitations and tries to do what is practical, maintaining a balance between family and work commitments. The work conditions associated with teaching, such as school hours and holidays, provide relief from the demands related to teaching, sustaining Grace in her daily teaching practice.

Grace's Coping with Educational Change

Educational change should be about "new theories or practices and better ways of doing things" (Grace, Interview#4, 30/8/04, p. 70), but Grace has found this is not always the case. For her, educational change has meant an increase in paperwork and the use of acronyms, more in-class interruptions and huge demands on teachers' time. Grace copes with the demands associated with educational change by being informed, reflecting on and rationalizing educational changes prior to implementation.

A lifelong learner, Grace is an avid reader of educational literature. To cope with the increase in educational change Grace has learnt to skim read and access quality reading recommended either by her university lecturers or her current school's administrators, whom she holds in high regard. Initially resistant to the volume of change taking place, particularly at her present school, Grace found through reading recommended articles "I slowly developed a keen understanding about how important these things are and the quality you get from them" (Grace, Interview#2, 9/8/04, p. 22).

Grace also stated:

> I like knowing what I'm doing and where I'm going. When I try out, or go through educational change, I don't know if I'd actually chase it… I'll take it on, and I'll look at things for a while. I don't take it on straight away though, when some things are introduced. I'll look and I'll think about it for a while. Then, I'm a very visual person and verbal as well, I'll try and picture it in my mind how I see it working. And if I can draw that visual image and that visual picture then I'll start to give it a go. With the

> children working, I try to visualise how they're going to be, what they'll be doing and if that sort of thing would work. (Grace, Interview#4, 30/8/04, p. 70).

Time and reflective practice allow Grace to evaluate educational changes and determine what will provide quality education for her students. In trialling changes Grace comments "If I find something is successful with the children then I'll scrap things that I don't think are worthwhile" Grace, Interview#2, 9/8/04, p. 32), streamlining her teaching practice so that she is not adding to her workload.

As acting Deputy Principal, K to 3 Team Leader and Literacy Coordinator Grace has become familiar with current changes and has been responsible for sharing information with teaching colleagues and parents. In these experiences Grace has relied on knowledge acquired from reading, and has valued being able to work with colleagues, implementing school-based changes together, stating:

> We're starting to get a little bit more work smart and realise to cope with all this changes we need to start working together more, helping one and other. (Grace, Interview2, 9/8/04, p. 24).

To cope with educational change Grace prefers to take time to be informed through educational reading and to reflect on what changes mean, and how they apply to her own teaching practice. Grace has also come to value being able to collaborate with her teaching colleagues to implement educational changes, supporting each other. Selective in implementing education changes, Grace is sustained in her teaching practice and delivery of quality education to students.

Grace's Critical Experiences in Sustainment

Enjoying her teaching career, Grace reflected that many of her beliefs about teaching stem from her own upbringing. A happy childhood, close family life and private-school education instilled in Grace a strong moral framework, with an emphasis on fairness, tolerance and respect for others. Considering her private schooling to be strict, traditionally based and boring, Grace has endeavoured to make her teaching not only interesting for her students, but also for herself. Consequently, Grace applies her moral beliefs and knowledge of children to deliver a stimulating and varied learning program for her students, sustaining her interest and engagement in teaching.

An experience that impacted on her sustainment in teaching occurred when Grace was in her second year of teaching part-time at an Education Support Unit, in a tandem-teaching position. Grace encountered a parent who held unrealistic expectations for her child and concerns about Grace and her tandem teacher's approach to teaching. To resolve these issues both teachers were involved in mediations with a school psychologist and the parent, eventually developing an Individualised Education Program and specific teaching strategies to met the child's needs. This time proved stressful, but it was through closely collaborating with the other tandem teacher, constantly communicating on the telephone, that Grace felt sustained in her teaching practice. As Grace stated, "knowing that someone else was undergoing the same feelings assisted us. We didn't feel isolated" (Grace, Interview#2, 9/8/04, p. 13). Professional support and collaboration enabled Grace to work through this negative experience and be sustained in her teaching practice.

At her present school professional support continues to be important to Grace's sustainment as a teacher. Grace's line managers, a previous deputy principal and the current principal, have given Grace written articles to read related to current thinking on quality education. Initially, Grace viewed these with scepticism but, upon reflection, began to see the relevance for her students and modified her teaching practice. With their encouragement Grace has also been empowered to read more widely, attend professional development sessions, undertake leadership roles within the school and share her ideas with others. The current principal also instigated Grace's change to teaching Pre-Primary and Year One students, a move that has further sustained Grace's job satisfaction and occupational motivation.

Grace has found that her experiences in teaching have been rewarding and enjoyable, where each has been as a learning experience from which she has developed and expanded on her role as a teacher. Having a strong moral grounding, the desire to change her teaching practices and the support of professional colleagues has enabled Grace to be sustained in her teaching, through both positive and negative experiences.

Grace's Summary

Throughout her teaching career Grace has been sustained in her professional commitment through proactively seeking changes to enhance her teaching abilities and benefit her students. Reading quality educational literature, furthering her studies and attending professional development sessions enables Grace to gain a deeper understanding of early childhood education pedagogy. Thorough preparation, planning and collaborating with her professional colleagues also contribute to Grace sustaining her commitment to teaching.

Working with children in a cooperative learning environment has been a prime source of job satisfaction and occupational motivation for Grace. Autonomy of practice has proven rewarding for Grace, as has working collaboratively with colleagues. It is also through being open to change and willing to modify her teaching practice that Grace has been stimulated in her thinking and motivated to continue teaching.

Grace's teaching pedagogy has developed through the experience of teaching, learning and applying various strategies to meet her students' needs. Reading also contributes to Grace's teaching practice, providing information for reflective thinking and adaptation to the classroom. A sound knowledge of child development, altruistic beliefs and a desire to provide quality education for her students sustains Grace's ability to implement a thematic program, emphasizing cooperative learning and higher-order thinking strategies.

Reflective thinking, time management and thorough planning allow Grace to cope with the daily demands of teaching. Grace also values sharing her teaching role with the education assistant. Aware of her own limitations, Grace maintains a life-work balance, using weekends and holidays to break from routines and pursue sporting activities or other interests. Quiet times and music also facilitate reflective thinking, a practice that sustains Grace's commitment and motivation to teaching.

Aware of the inevitability of educational change, Grace is cautious in adopting changes indiscriminately, preferring to take time to reflect on implementations. Grace reads, attends professional development sessions and

engages in professional dialogue with her colleagues, then reflects on acquired knowledge. This approach enables Grace to implement changes she considers are sustainable and relevant to her students.

For over 23 years Grace has taught in early childhood education, valuing each experience as an opportunity to work with people, in particular students, and to develop her own skills as a teacher. Grace also enjoys the work conditions associated to teaching, finding that teaching is a profession that suits her lifestyle. When reflecting on her teaching Grace states “the day goes so fast, because it’s enjoyable” (Interview#5, 13/9/04, p. 96).

Case Study Five: Mel

Description of the Location

The fifth case study was conducted over a 2 month period at the participant, Mel's (pseudonym), current teaching location. The five interviews took place each fortnight in Mel's classroom, after her school day had finished and lasted a minimum of 45 minutes.

Mel's classroom was one of several located in a traditional 1950's linear-designed school, each room sharing a common covered breeze-way. On one side of the room a row of computers were set up for student use. Children's work was displayed on the back wall and strung across the room, with several piles of completed work stacked at the back of the room. One corner of the room was partitioned off for quiet reading and to store accumulated paperwork. Over the duration of the case study the students' tables and chairs were placed in several different arrangements, reflective of Mel's desire for variety and change.

Mel's Teaching Background

Mel is a teacher in her late 40's who has taught in primary schools for over 24 years, 21 of those years in early childhood education. Training as a primary school teacher Mel gained a Diploma of Teaching in 1976, which she later upgraded to a Bachelor of Education in 1982.

Mel has taught in a range of locations, both rural and metropolitan, teaching students from years one to year six. Mel has also worked as an Education Officer in Education Department of Western Australia's Central Office for 3 years, developing programs and policies in environmental studies. Further to this, Mel has been a Junior Literacy Support Teacher for a year and acted as a School Principal in a rural school for a year. Currently Mel is teaching year one students at a metropolitan school, a position she has enjoyed for the past 2 years.

Mel's Professional Commitment

When discussing professional commitment Mel stated:

> Professional commitment is more about behaviour, attitudes and efforts that you make to achieving your professional goals, whether they're the goals you set yourself or the goals set by your association, employer, or the system. So in my mind, if you've got a high level of commitment then you put in a lot of effort, you have a big strong positive attitude. You tend to be very much out there and up front, in terms of what you do. (Mel, Interview#4, 27/9/04, p. 57).

In relation to her professional commitment Mel finds "I do the best I can, in the time I have. I do tend to take into account though the fact that I have a life outside of school" (Mel, Interview#4, 27/9/04, p. 57). Effort, attitude and time impact on Mel sustaining her commitment to the teaching profession.

As part of her professional commitment Mel has always been prepared to spend out-of-school hours developing planning documents, evaluating children's work and keeping records of children's learning. Mel sees this as a professional responsibility and is prepared to take school-work home on a regular basis. Associated to this is Mel's willingness to spend part of her income on acquiring resources to stimulate and extend student learning.

Keeping up to date with current educational practice is another facet of Mel's professional commitment. To sustain this practice Mel devotes personal time to reading educational literature and attending educational functions, such as the recent EYES Conference, provided that events don't clash with her non-teaching commitments. These strategies enable Mel to have "a sense of involvement" (Mel, Interview#4, 27/9/04, p. 57) in the teaching profession and not feel isolated in her classroom.

Working in a stimulating and collegial work-environment further sustains Mel's professional commitment. During her teaching career Mel has been involved in numerous school-based committees, aimed at promoting quality learning amongst students and teachers. At her sixth school, with the encouragement of the School's Administration, all teachers, including Mel, joined discussion groups, were involved in action research and conducted presentations to inform colleagues of current trends. A similar collegial environment exists in Mel's current school, where Mel's

line-manager promotes teachers' involvement in professional development sessions, professional dialogue and teachers expanding their professional practice. These experiences sustain Mel's commitment to her profession.

Fulfilling obligations to her employer is also part of Mel's professional commitment, particularly in regards to educational change:

> The other point is, at the end of the day, I'm being employed. If my employer requires me to do something in particular, then I'm obligated to do that. And that's why I'm still in the State system, because I don't have a problem with my employer. (Mel, Interview#2, 6/9/04, p. 33).

Trusting her employer's decisions are based on promoting quality education for all students, Mel willingly implements recommended changes. Mel has also been prepared to take on extra duties when requested. Working as an Education Officer Mel spent additional hours developing policies relating to environmental issues. Mel also took on the role of Acting Principal for a year, even though it proved detrimental to her health. In her current teaching position Mel continues to spend out-of-school hours meeting her employer's requirements for accountability, considering this part of her professional commitment.

To sustain her professional commitment Mel is willing to devote time and effort to preparation and teaching, as long as she can maintain a life-work balance. Mel has continued to build on her professional knowledge through reading educational literature, accessing the Internet and attending professional development sessions. Affiliation to her profession and a desire to follow her employer's directives also contributes to Mel sustaining a commitment to the teaching profession.

Mel's Job Satisfaction

Working with young children and observing their learning provides Mel with her greatest job satisfaction. In Mel's teaching career she has taught a range of year levels but has found her greatest job satisfaction has been gained when working with year one students:

> I really enjoy working with the very young children because you can the see the difference that what you do makes. It's not a case of you're doing X,Y, Z and you're never sure what the response is. With younger children you can see the response. So I like working with the year ones because

> they come in not reading and writing and they go out with some development in that area. (Mel, Interview#4, 27/9/04, p. 58).

At this year level Mel has been able to observe the consequences of her teaching, seeing the progress children make in their work. Observing her students' learning and development provides Mel with visual confirmation that her teaching efforts are worthwhile.

Not only does student achievement contribute to Mel's sense of job satisfaction, but also the students themselves:

> I also like this age group because they're more fun to be with. You're not constantly thinking of the power games of older children that they like to get into. I get very frustrated with that… It's an innocence and there's also that you can get away with turning something into a joke. (Mel, Interview#4, 27/9/04, p. 58).

Daily interactions with her students are enjoyable, sustaining Mel's job satisfaction.

Throughout her years of teaching Mel has also enjoyed the ability to provide a stimulating learning environment, displaying children's learning, using a wide range of resources, incorporating print around the room and making her room welcoming to her students:

> I try and have a lot of print in the room. I try and make the room welcoming and interesting to the kids. And, so, if I come in the morning and turn on the lights and go- Oh, Yeah! I get job satisfaction. I feel like it's looking the way I like it to look. (Mel, Interview#4, 27/9/04, p. 59).

Teaching year one students has also allowed Mel to develop an environment conducive to student learning, in particular "hands on" learning, where students are encouraged to explore their environment:

> I like the so-called Play Approach. I like the involvement and exploration of the environment and general resources. It's sad, but you don't see much Mobilo in older classes. Mobilo, Duplo, Leggo. I really like that kind of stuff and I really think there's a greater acceptance at this age, by the System (sic), that if they're not ready for something, then you have to wait. (Mel, Interview#4, 27/9/04, p. 58).

Having the autonomy to implement teaching practices she believes in, further contributes to Mel's job satisfaction.

Associated to this, Mel receives job satisfaction through having a degree of flexibility and variety in her daily teaching practice:

> There's also the flexibility that when something or something else pops up- like the other day we'd come in to do News and I realised there was a cement-mixer truck outside. So, we dropped that and went outside and took pieces of paper and sat and drew the cement mixer. And I like that! Being able to do that makes me feel good with what I'm doing. (Mel, Interview#4, 27/9/04, p. 60).

Flexibility and variety in her conditions of employment also contributes to Mel's job satisfaction:

> I also like the moving from school to school, and having to be flexible to cope with that. So that you're meeting new staff, you're meeting new people, new systems, new school expectations. (Mel, Interview#4, 27/9/04, p. 60).

These experiences make teaching a rewarding profession for Mel.

Mel's job satisfaction is derived from her association with young children, observing the progress they make and working in enriched learning environments. Mel also enjoys the variety and flexibility afforded to her throughout her teaching career. Mel commented "If I didn't enjoy what I was doing then I wouldn't stay here" (Mel, Interview#3, 20/9/04, p. 53).

Mel's Occupational Motivation

In discussing factors that contribute to sustaining her occupational motivation Mel stated:

> I do enjoy what I do. I do have fun. I enjoy the challenge and the stimulation. You know, when you've got something that's not working and you need to adapt it, or something else happens and you can see the benefit of doing that new activity, and finding a way to rekindle what you do. So I like that sort of challenge. (Mel, Interview#4, 27/9/04, p. 61).

Job satisfaction, the ability to experience new challenges and be exposed to change has contributed to Mel's occupational motivation.

When facing challenges within her profession, Mel finds it is her attitude that sustains her occupational motivation:

> My persistence, to me, is that I keep coming back and keep trying and keep trying something different. And if it means that I have to change something in me, then I'll give it a go. You don't have to stay that way. You can be flexible. (Mel, Interview#1, 23/8/04, p. 11).

Mel first became aware of the need to persevere whilst attending a small village school in England, where she was treated as an outsider, having come from a different culture and education system. This experience impacted strongly on her life decisions, teaching included. Consequently, Mel has learnt to access educational literature or the Internet to discover new ideas on educational practice to sustain her interest in teaching. Using acquired knowledge Mel then perseveres to meet the needs of her students.

An appreciation of variety and change has contributed to Mel teaching in a variety of scenarios, where each teaching role has provided new challenges and mental stimulation. Although Mel has come to prefer teaching the younger students, her experiences have allowed Mel to vary teaching practices, classroom layout, and class dynamics. During the interview sessions Mel indirectly demonstrated this propensity for change by varying the physical layout of the classroom, group seating arrangements and the children's work displays several times.

Change and variation also feature in Mel's teaching practice, as "if you're doing the same thing every time, it's boring" (Mel, Interview# 2, 6/9/04, p. 22). Themes used to plan and develop children's learning are rarely repeated, based either on Mel's interests and readings, or on topics and questions arising from students' dialogue. At the time of the interviews Mel and the students had just completed learning about Ancient Egypt and were exploring the theme of Space, topics Mel had never previously covered. Having an interest in the topic and learning alongside her students sustains Mel's motivation in teaching.

Daily contact with her students not only provides Mel with job satisfaction but also contributes to her occupational motivation. Time spent studying and working as an Education Officer allowed Mel to engage in self-reflection, to reassess her career and affirm that she is best suited to teaching students in the early childhood years:

> I had actually missed the kids. In those three years I had exposure to, I'd worked with kindy through to university level students. I'd done in-servicing adults. I had done material development, regional material development…All sorts of things. I wrote to departments and things like

> that, but I had missed the kids! I'd missed the interaction with the children as a whole! (Mel, Interview#1, 23/8/04, p. 6).

Mel enjoys "working with the kids" (Mel, Interview#4, 27/9/04, p. 62), as the younger students are forth right in their ideas and responsive to the learning activities she provides. If the students are enjoying what they are doing, and she can share that enjoyment, then Mel feels rewarded and is motivated to continue in her teaching.

Mel has maintained her occupational motivation through perseverance and seeking challenges in her professional life. Experiencing change and variety in work locations, job descriptions, learning environments and students motivates Mel to continue teaching. Accessing educational literature and the Internet provides Mel with teaching ideas that are of interest to her and will stimulate her students' learning, enabling her to provide variety in her teaching practice. Mel's enjoyment of the social interaction with her students further contributes to Mel's occupational motivation in teaching. Being stimulated in her work and work environment sustains Mel's occupational motivation.

Mel's Effective Teaching Practices

Mel referred to *effective teaching practices* as:

> Being organised, and that means everything from your planning through to your records and resources. And I'm just making that as a global statement, to cover all sorts of things. Having a sense of- you've got your planning but you are prepared to move away from it. So you're prepared to be flexible… So having that flexibility is great but that flexibility is only there because you've got that planning and you know how to link things in. (Mel, Interview#4, 27/9/04, p. 63).

Pedagogical knowledge, preparation and the ability to be flexible in teaching practice are the basis of Mel's effective teaching practice.

In Mel's first years of teaching her pedagogical knowledge came from her pre-service training. Reading, reflection, and time spent as a classroom teacher has contributed to Mel's ability to make her own judgements in regards to student learning and best practice. Increasingly, Mel has also found that her students direct her teaching:

> I also find that I'm actually getting better at trusting the kids, in terms of what they need and what their knowledge is, and their interests. When I first started teaching, child-negotiated curriculum didn't exist, and you had your Unit Progress in Reading and you did your first unit and tested it… But now I find if we are doing something and I can say to them- how would you do that? Not having fixed ideas of my own, they might come up with a chart or a poster or a play. Now I'm finding that I'm able to say- okay, let's do that. Because, I'm accepting now that the learning that they do, when they do those activities, is as valid as what they do when I set the scene. (Mel, Interview#4, 27/9/04, p. 64).

This practice leads Mel to implement an inquiry approach to learning, developing themes based on personal or students' interests.

Over the years Mel has streamlined her planning process, in order to be more flexible and effective as a teacher:

> I have gone from having everything in detail and pre-planned, which does take away your ability to be flexible, because you put all that effort into doing them, the work. You sort of feel obligated to do it! (Mel, Interview#2, 6/9/04, p. 27).

Prior to teaching Mel prepares an overview of integrated learning, accompanied by mind-maps and before-and-after T charts. Mel has also developed a checklist covering the "mechanics of learning, like the actual handwriting and the actual letter recognition and sight words" (Mel, Interview#2, 6/9/04, p. 19). This planning process enables Mel to link her knowledge of child development, curriculum documentation and her students to thematic ideas and resources. A Daily Work Pad provides the detail and structure of daily activities. Having a framework, with long term objectives, allows Mel to be flexible in her teaching practice.

Intrinsically motivated, Mel constantly reads educational literature in the form of books, magazines and journal articles to direct her practice. When Mel studied fulltime she read widely and affirmed her knowledge of child development. With the encouragement of the School Principal and a fellow teacher at her sixth school, Mel focussed her reading on early childhood pedagogy, strengthened her understanding of best practice. Currently, Mel has been reading articles on Gardner's Multiple Intelligences and Bloom's Taxonomy of Cognitive Domains, to expand her teaching pedagogy. Mel also attends professional development sessions

to broaden her pedagogical knowledge. These sources sustain Mel's teaching practice, providing information for reflection and implementation.

Through being resourceful, a "careful hoarder" (Mel, Interview#4, 27/9/04, p. 64), collecting a range of newspaper cuttings, journal articles and books Mel continues to adapt her teaching program. Accessing the Internet and watching television documentaries also provides potential ideas for topics to stimulate children's learning. Having these sources of information readily available sustains Mel's current teaching practice.

Mel has developed her teaching pedagogy through being open to change and accessing a wide range of educational resources. Being organised, having an understanding of child development and planning in advance enables Mel to offer a learning program that is relevant to her students' needs. Accumulating a range of resources and listening to her students allows Mel to be flexible and implement a child-negotiated curriculum. Mel's effective teaching practices are sustained by her use of variety and desire to provide a stimulating learning environment for both her-self and her students.

Mel's Coping with Daily Demands of Teaching

In order to cope with the daily demands of teaching Mel has learnt it is important to manage time effectively and implement "minimum effort that's intelligent effort. It's not a case of being inactive, but just going with the flow" (Mel, Interview#4, 27/9/04, p. 64). Mel has also learnt that being organised, developing routines to sustain her daily teaching practice.

When accessing information, preparing for teaching and demonstrating accountability, Mel finds:

> I'm always looking for something else and I'm also looking for anything that will make my life easier. I think, as I said before, I'm basically a lazy person and if I can do three rubics covering three learning areas in one piece of work, then Hey! It's a mad man then who does three pieces of work and three rubrics! (sic) (Mel, Interview# 2, 6/9/04, p. 28).

Adopting cross-curricula documentation has reduced time spent on compiling evidence of students learning for accountability purposes. Minimizing detail in

planning documentation also affords Mel greater teaching flexibility, particularly when children's learning and interests lead in other directions.

"To me, time is crucial. We don't have enough of it" (Mel, Interview#5, 25/10/04, p. 81). Time management and self-awareness are critical to Mel's sustainment of her daily practice. Over the years Mel has learnt to acknowledge her limitations and conserve her energy, consciously slowing down when she is feeling tired, and completing one task at a time:

> Allowing yourself to slow down and allowing yourself time to breathe. So often we get caught up with I must get this done, I've got this deadline, I must, must, must. And all that ends up is you chase your tail and everybody gets tired and cranky. (Mel, Interview#4, 27/9/04, p. 65)

In having realistic expectations of herself Mel is also aware that she is not indispensable, or the sole educating influence on her students, and needs to look after herself if she is to sustain her practice of teaching. This means taking time to eat regularly, drink lots of water and get regular sleep and exercise. This also means allowing time for reflective thinking, such as during her long drive home, and to share her concerns and ideas with a sympathetic listener, her husband.

To be organised Mel is prepared to arrive at school up to an hour before the students and to stay after the end of the school day. Mel is also prepared to take work home related to planning or accountability to complete at night. In her daily teaching, Mel has learnt to devote more time to delivering instructions, to ensure children understand what is expected of them, particularly if her students have learning difficulties:

> It is better use of my time to sit down with those five kids, give them that extra time, and then send them on their way, than it is to send them on their way without knowing what to do, and then having to deal with the discipline problems after… It's a more efficient way. It's the lazy way, in that it's saving me from effort later on, but it's actually an efficient way. (Interview#1, 23/8/04, p. 11).

Another potential frustration is leaving work incomplete. To avoid this Mel is prepared to be flexible in time management, preferring to finish one task before she commences the next, even if it means she does not complete all the day's planned activities:

> You've got to do the basics, to get through those basics, because you realise that not only are those kids going to hit year two, but it's also going to effect what you do as well, the quality of what you get out of them. (Mel, Interview#3, 20/9/04, p. 54).

Accepting that students are not always going to do what is expected of them, Mel finds her accumulation of resources and ideas gives her the flexibility to organize alternative tasks and modify her time scheduling to cope with changing events.

Routines and rosters also sustain Mel's daily teaching. Having a routine enables the day to flow smoothly and provides structure for Mel's students, making them aware of what is expected of them. Through varying the level of student activity in each learning session Mel maintains the students' focus. A class roster facilitates students taking responsibility for their own classroom environment, assuming tasks that distract Mel from her role as a teacher. Aware there are times when her energy levels are low, Mel involves her students in the daily operation of the class so she can cope with the physical demands related to teaching. Mel is prepared to ask for help from parents and colleagues, and to accept it. This has proven beneficial when Mel has sought information on particular themes or required additional support in the classroom.

Mel copes with the daily demands of teaching through knowing herself and her students. As a result of this, Mel has learnt to take care of her health, have realistic expectations and be prepared to devote personal time to planning and accountability documentation. In her daily practice Mel implements a routine and a range of time management strategies to minimize potential stresses. It is also through having resources readily available and being flexible in her expectations and teaching style that Mel is able to implement a learning program suited to her students' needs and cope with the demands of her work.

Mel's Coping with Educational Change

Commenting on educational change, Mel stated:

> I tend to try and go with the flow. I try to see the positive in something before condemning it. I try to give it a go. The system, as a whole, generally recognizes that there are difficulties associated with change, and generally the system- I'm talking about the Education Department- tries to provide time, a bit of transition time. And generally it's built into the process. I find

> that if I can go with the flow, have a go at something, then I can make up my mind about the change and respond to it in a more honest way. (Mel, Interview#4, 27/9/04, p. 68).

Mel's positive attitude and willingness to accept educational change enables her to cope with the demands associated to its implementation.

Believing in her employer's integrity, Mel has learnt to "trust the system, that there is actually a value here in what you're doing… You have to believe that somebody has thought this out because there could be value in it" (Mel, Interview #5, 25/10/04, p. 86). Consequentially, Mel attempts to see the positive aspects of imposed change, and the benefits for her students.

Although Mel has been involved in the early stages of implementing system-wide educational changes, such as her time spent working in Central Office, she has learnt that this can lead to developing an overt sense of ownership and failure to see potential flaws. Aware of this trait Mel still likes to be actively involved in educational changes and enjoys attending professional development sessions and functions where she can interact with like-minded positive people, gaining the most benefit from those who have a practical basis to their ideas. Mel is also proactive in seeking information relating to educational change through reading educational literature and accessing the Internet.

In order for Mel to cope with educational change at a school level Mel collaborates with her colleagues. Mel's time at her sixth school, exemplified this, where Mel was involved in collegial meetings and learnt from her peers aspects related to the practical application of early childhood philosophies. A similar collegial environment is also present at Mel's current school, where collegial support has led her to explore different approaches to student learning. In both instances, school administrators encouraged and supported the staff throughout the change process, often giving teachers articles to read or arranging relevant professional development sessions.

Within the classroom, it is having the information and time available, that contributes to Mel's ability to change her teaching practice. Aware of her own

limitations, Mel seeks help and advice from others who have a greater understanding of different teaching strategies, such as staff from the local District Office. Using this knowledge and her own readings Mel will slowly implement changes to her teaching practice, finding “you pick the bits out that suit you and the bits that seem to do a good job and the rest you just let go” (Mel, Interview#2, 6/9/04, p. 33).

To stay enthused and motivated Mel has always been prepared to change her teaching practice. Accepting imposed educational change as part of her responsibility as a teacher, Mel is proactive in seeking ways she can realistically implement change in the classroom. Reading educational literature, attending professional development sessions, seeking support and collaborating with her colleagues enables Mel to cope with both system-imposed and self-imposed changes to her teaching practice.

Mel’s Critical Experiences in Sustainment

Mel’s teaching experiences have been rewarding, each providing a different challenge and requiring her to adapt her teaching program to suit the needs of her students. When Mel started teaching she learnt on the job, as her pre-service training had been in the middle-primary years and she had to modify her practice to suit her year two students. At that stage in her career Mel taught from a prescribed curriculum, following what was set out with little thought to the rationale behind her teaching.

It wasn’t until Mel took a year’s Leave Without Pay (LWP) and studied fulltime to complete her teaching degree that Mel began to develop a greater awareness of the rationale behind early childhood education. This experience enabled Mel to have time to reflect on her teaching practice. It also led Mel to becoming an avid reader of educational literature, a habit that has provided Mel with an ongoing source of occupational motivation and sustainment in teaching.

Mel continued to have confidence in her teaching ability until working as a Junior Support Literacy Teacher, when Mel’s teaching practice was questioned by two teachers on staff. Mel had developed a program based on play, combined with physical, creative and manipulative activities, for year one students not yet ready for

formal work. The two teachers lodged a formal complaint with Mel's line manager, requesting a more structured program. Mel was placed under duress but refused to back down, as she knew she was "on the right track" (Mel, Interview#4, 27/9/04, p. 74). The situation eventually resolved when the teachers left the school and the Principal apologized for mishandling the situation. This experience strengthened Mel's desire to continue to implement appropriate early childhood practices.

Mel felt further vindicated when she relocated to her sixth school and developed a professional collegial relationship with a teacher, an advocate of child-centred learning and early childhood philosophies. This teacher encouraged Mel in her practice and clarified Mel's pedagogical understandings. Together they combined classes to team teach and participated in district-based initiatives related to early childhood education. At this school Mel found the school principal to be an educational leader, inspiring his staff to develop a collaborative learning culture. Valuing early childhood education, this principal also ensured this area was well resourced. Teaching in this setting provided Mel with job satisfaction and occupational motivation, sustaining her commitment to early childhood education.

In contrast, Mel's next teaching position proved onerous as she was given the additional responsibility of Acting Principal for a year, as the School had a difficult clientele and had undergone several changes in administration. Mel became ill and took time off, using part of her Long Service Leave entitlements. Mel learnt from this experience "to listen to your body" (Interview# 25/10/04, p. 79), and to avoid situations where she would be placed under stress.

In relocating to her current school, Mel has found a similar collegial environment to what had existed in her sixth school. Here, the School Principal also provides educational leadership and encourages his staff to collaborate, extend their learning and teaching practice. Mel also enjoys being able to teach the younger students once more, stimulated and sustained in her teaching practice.

Mel's critical teaching experiences have affirmed her beliefs in the value of early childhood education. Benefiting from collegial and administrative support,

Mel has been sustained through each experience by her beliefs, perseverance and willingness to change and evolve as an early childhood teacher.

Mel's Summary

As an experienced teacher Mel has taught in a variety of educational settings, catering for a diverse range of students. It has been Mel's persistence and willingness to adapt to changing circumstances that has contributed to her sustainment in teaching.

Mel's professional commitment has been sustained through accessing educational literature and participation in collegial groups. To fulfil her obligations as a teacher Mel strives to be organized, devoting out-of school hours to planning for student learning and following directives given by her employer. A combination of attitude and effort sustains Mel's commitment to teaching and ability to maintain a life-work balance.

Mel derives her greatest job satisfaction and occupational motivation from working with young children: their innocence and response to her teaching. In observing the growth and development of her students Mel feels rewarded by her teaching efforts. Working in an enriched learning environment that affords variety and flexibility in practice, sustains Mel's job satisfaction and occupational motivation.

Accessing a range of sources, including educational literature and the Internet, sustains Mel's occupational motivation and effective teaching practice. As a lifelong learner, Mel is open to new ideas and seeks opportunities to improve her teaching and meet the varying needs of her students. Flexibility, variety and autonomy further contribute to Mel's occupational motivation and teaching practice. Mel also feels sustained in her profession through actively seeking change and new challenges, either in her conditions of employment or in her teaching practice. With the encouragement of close work-colleagues and inspiring line managers Mel has developed her understanding of early childhood philosophies and is sustained as an effective teacher in the classroom.

The ability to be organised has contributed to Mel coping with the daily demands of teaching. Having a range of resources available and initial planning written down allows Mel to be flexible in her practice, adapting tasks to her own energy levels and those of her students. Routines, class rosters and devoting additional time to planning and preparation are strategies Mel employs to cope with her workload. It is also through knowing her limitations, being prepared to ask for assistance and taking care of her health that Mel is sustained in her daily teaching practice.

Accepting educational change as part of her role as a teacher, Mel has sustained a positive and proactive approach to change. Reading, attending professional development sessions and inspiring administrative leadership have contributed to Mel being willingly to modify her teaching practice and undertake imposed educational changes. Mel’s positive attitudes towards educational change contribute to her sustainment in the teaching profession. Furthermore, Mel’s love of working with young children and observation of their development sustains Mel as a teacher in early childhood education.

Case Study Six: Hilary

Description of the Location

Interviews for the sixth and final case study took place over a 2 month period, at times suited to Hilary (pseudonym), the sixth participant's work commitments. Each of the five interviews were conducted in out-of-school hours, in Hilary's classroom and lasted between 40 and 105 minutes.

Hilary's classroom was large and uncluttered, divided into designated learning areas, with an abundance of resources and pin-up space, displaying examples of children's work and items of interest related to projects the students had studied. Interview sessions took place at a cluster of student tables, with the tape recorder placed between the researcher and participant.

Hilary's Teaching Background.

Hilary is an early childhood teacher in her early 60's, who has taught in pre-primary settings for over 39 years. Completing her teacher training in Victoria, Hilary graduated with a three-year Diploma in Infant Studies in 1963, later upgrading her qualifications to a Bachelor of Education in 1993 and a Masters of Education in 1999.

Hilary has had a rich and varied background in teaching, working in five different education systems and in a range of educational roles. After teaching in Victoria for 3 years, Hilary moved overseas where she worked in the United Kingdom for a year and in the Virgin Islands for 4 years, under both the British and American systems of education. Hilary also spent a year working in a university-based research project, developing intervention programs and literacy resources for local children with learning difficulties, established a commune play school and was a volunteer in a Head Start Program, providing parenting-skill training and early intervention for pre-school children considered educationally-at-risk.

In relocating to Western Australia, Hilary returned to classroom teaching at a small school in the outer metropolitan region, where she has stayed for the past 29 years, teaching kindergarten and transitional (later known as pre-primary level) students. Hilary is also a member of the Independent Pre-Schooler's Association,

attends a Reggio-Interest Group and liaises with educational institutions to act as a mentor for pre-service education students. Hilary continues to enjoy her role as a teacher of early childhood education.

Hilary's Professional Commitment

Hilary stated:

> As a professional I believe, first of all that you don't work set hours. You undertake, in a professional way, to educate children and your preparation, your working with children and their families, and the way you what to do that, is your commitment. So, if that involves other preparation at home, if it involves a lot of work after hours, if it involves holiday work and if you feel that's all part of your professional commitment, that's what you do. That's what I do… I think the commitment is to take them (the children) as far as they can go. (Hilary, Interview#4, 29/10/04, p. 71).

To sustain her professional commitment Hilary is prepared to work additional hours to fulfil her teaching responsibilities.

In her first teaching position Hilary learnt the value of being thoroughly prepared:

> The Infant Mistress was an amazing lady. She was a tyrant, but she was, she probably gave me the best grounding for proper preparation. We had to submit our lesson plans in on the Thursday. On Monday morning we were called in and queried… she was a tyrant in that sense, but it just laid the foundations for absolutely outstanding preparation. (Hilary, Interview#1, 17/9/04, p. 4-5).

Devoting long hours to detailed preparation is a habit that Hilary has perpetuated in order to facilitate students' learning and demonstrate accountability. Hilary is willing to work after school hours, to take work home and work during holiday-time as part of her commitment to teaching.

Hilary also commented:

> Being married to a professional, and in a family that are professionals, I grew up knowing that if you take something on, you make a commitment to it and you do it to the best of your ability. When I made a decision to stay in education I decided I would be, not a good, but a fantastic teacher! ...That image is important to me. (Hilary, Interview#4, 29/10/04, p. 73).

To fulfil this belief Hilary reads widely to gain an in-depth understanding of child development and early childhood philosophies. From her readings, Hilary adopted the Project Approach early in her career, as the basis of her teaching:

> I think from reading, it was a logical way to learn. To do your learning through something that was of interest to all children, and could, that could lead to learning in all areas (sic). It was something I really, really wanted to pursue… I was convinced from the reading that it just wouldn't fail! (Hilary, Interview#4, 29/20/04, p. 78).

This approach has been the basis of her teaching practice and sustains her commitment to teaching. Hilary is prepared to work in partnership with children and their families, taking time to observe students and develop a learning program and environment that is stimulating and developmentally appropriate.

As well as reading educational literature Hilary attends professional development sessions and is involved in professional interest groups, such as the Reggio Interest Group. International travel also sustains Hilary's professional commitment, visiting early childhood centres in many countries, such as China, Sweden, Italy and France, to experience first-hand how innovations are put into practice. Her travel experiences have led Hilary to implementing a Reggio Emilia-inspired approach in her teaching and to fulfilling a long-term ambition of furthering her studies in early childhood education. These practices inspire and sustain Hilary's commitment to early childhood education.

Hilary's professional commitment is also sustained through her involvement with professional colleagues. At the beginning of her career Hilary was treated as a peer by her college lecturers, working with pre-service student teachers in her first year of teaching:

> Three weeks after I started teaching I had my first student, so that the people who had been my teachers then came to see the students, that very next year. So that was quite amazing! So my lecturers became my friends. (Hilary, Interview#1, 17/9/04, p. 5).

This experience strengthened Hilary's confidence and sense of professional collegiality. Hilary continues to act as a mentor to pre-service students, contributing to their learning and finding their ideas stimulating and thought-provoking. Working with pre-service students also enables Hilary to maintain contact with university-

level colleagues and to engage in professional dialogue at different levels; practices that further sustain Hilary's commitment to the teaching profession.

Hilary's professional commitment to early childhood education is sustained by her willingness to develop her students' abilities and her own teaching skills to the best of her ability. Devoting time and effort to preparation and planning enables Hilary to sustain her professional commitment, as does Hilary's thirst for knowledge. Hilary continually reads research and current trends in early childhood education to be informed and productive in her teaching. Furthermore, engaging in professional dialogue and mentorship sustains Hilary's professional commitment.

Hilary's Job Satisfaction.

Teaching in early childhood education provides Hilary with a high level of job satisfaction:

> For me, job satisfaction is getting up in the morning and thinking- I'm looking forward to today. And getting here, and really greeting the children, greeting the families, enjoying working. I couldn't be as happy if I was working alone in a classroom and that's probably one of the reasons I've stayed, because I think early childhood has been such a great professional buzz to me...I really enjoy watching the children learn. I enjoy watching the development of the children. I enjoy watching, and because we're making learning visible, that development is able to be seen over the year. I get a great buzz when people come in and I'm able to show them what a child did first, in February, and what they're doing now. (Hilary, Interview#4, 29/10/04, p. 73).

From the onset of her teaching career, Hilary has enjoyed working in partnership with families and her educational colleagues, observing the growth and development of her students. Hilary enjoys engaging in daily interactions with children and involving parents in her teaching program. Opportunities for socialisation also arise from Hilary's practice of conducting regular incursions, excursions and home visits.

Working in the early childhood setting, Hilary gains particular satisfaction from working with an education assistant:

> I really don't like working alone. I really use other people to bounce off, and I see a co-teacher (EA) as just the most amazing thing! That's probably why I don't like going too much further up the school. (Hilary, Interview#2, 28/9/04, p. 24).

Hilary enjoys collaboration with an education assistant, treating them as a professional colleague, respectful of their ideas and sharing teaching tasks. The social aspect of early childhood settings and ability to engage in varied forms and levels of social interaction sustains Hilary's job satisfaction in teaching.

Hilary derives satisfaction from observing the growth and development of her students:

> I enjoy working at this level because there is so much to be tapping into. I enjoy being with the kindies, but I notice the difference. I think it's probably pre-primary, year one and two. I think they take off! They leap forward in learning! It's quite amazing. (Hilary, Interview#4, 29/10/04, p. 87).

In recent years Hilary has gained further job satisfaction through documenting her observations and children's work to make learning visible:

> I've always had a reflective program, but I'm doing it the best I've ever done now. After going to Reggio my documentation improved…. Outcome-based education has encouraged me to make learning visible. And that's possible where the documentation you see now is experiences and outcomes. That's something I've done in the last 3 or 4 years in a much more structured way. (Hilary, Interview#2, 28/9/04, p. 32).

Although this practice is time-consuming, Hilary is rewarded with visual confirmation that her teaching is making a difference, extending her students' learning.

Being able to observe the progression of her students throughout their education further sustains Hilary's job satisfaction:

> The graduations. When I see the children that I've started, I get a great buzz going to year one and having a look at what they've done there. I get a greater buzz when they're graduating in year six and I get an ultra buzz when I see them graduate in year 12!...The satisfaction of staying in one school for quite a time is that you actually get to see this…It's also really a wonderful thing to have three or four children in a family come through your centre and be here. (Hilary, Interview#4, 29/10/04, p. 74).

Working in the one location for an extended time, Hilary has been able to attend graduation ceremonies, observe the growth of her students into young adults and develop long-term relationships with families.

Autonomy in teaching practice, having freedom and flexibility in use of content and teaching style also sustains Hilary's job satisfaction. Even in her first teaching position, where the Infant Mistress was prescriptive about planning, Hilary was allowed to teach how she wanted, as long as she could prove she was thoroughly prepared. Further teaching experiences have been equally enjoyable as Hilary has had the freedom to put her educational beliefs into practice, including working "in partnership with the families" (Hilary, Interview#4, 29/10/04, p. 73) and using "the environment as the third teacher" (Hilary, Interview#1, 17/9/04, p. 11). Hilary continues to gain satisfaction from being able to implement what she considers is best practice in early childhood education.

The opportunity that teaching affords for social engagement and interaction with a diverse range of people has contributed to Hilary's job satisfaction. Hilary has enjoyed working with children and parents, observing her students' development, both short and long term, through staying in one location for an extended period of time. Working in an early childhood setting, with an education assistant and autonomy in teaching practice has further contributed to sustaining Hilary's job satisfaction.

Hilary's Occupational Motivation

In discussing her occupational motivation Hilary stated:

> I have always been highly motivated ever since I was a child. My parents said that I knew what I wanted and I got on with it…I went and did education, I decided that I was going to be good at that too. So yes, I've got a high level. I'm not a totally competitive person but I have high expectations of myself and I work pretty strongly towards what I want. And so, if I decide I'm going to take something on, I work really hard to achieve that at a very high level. (Hilary, Interview#4, 29/10/04, p. 74).

Possessing a strong determination to excel in her chosen profession Hilary is intrinsically motivated to seek ways to challenge her thinking, extend her teaching pedagogy and sustain her motivation in early childhood teaching.

Variety and change have contributed to Hilary's sustainment in teaching. Hilary's first 10 years of teaching were varied, in clientele and location, each presenting Hilary with unique challenges. Significant experiences included teaching

lower socioeconomic children in England, working at a university with children with learning difficulties and volunteering in a Head Start project.

Although her present teaching location and clientele have been stable Hilary continues to be challenged and inspired by her teaching practice, implementing a Reggio-inspired Project Approach to extend her students' learning:

> I want to take them as far as they can go. My challenge is to know them, to see where they are and to take them as far as they can go. In other words, I'm not going to teach them a certain amount of curricula, and I never have. I look at the child as an individual, an individual in a Reggio Emilia inspired group setting, and then I'm going to extend them as far as they are able to. (Interview#4, 29/10/04, p. 71).

Hilary's determination to be an effective teacher and her commitment to provide quality education for her students sustains her motivation in teaching.

Professional reading is a strong source of occupational motivation for Hilary:

> I'm a great reader. I love reading. So I've been reading professionally from the moment I came out of teachers college. I'm a great one. Give me an idea that there's some great books about and I'll get hold of them. I've never stopped learning I think. And I see that teaching is a teaching-learning process… Now, I reading about Rogoff and I'm saying- Wow, I didn't know about this! So, yes, there's always something new that's coming up… I want to see where it fits with what I'm doing now, and has she got something that can add to what I'm doing. (Hilary Interview#4, 29/10/04, p. 80).

Reading educational literature, such as Barbara Rogoff's writings, challenges Hilary to question what she believes in and how new ideas relate to her teaching practice, providing mental stimulation and sustaining her occupational motivation.

Hilary's extensive travels, and observations of educational innovations in other countries, are a further source of occupational motivation. Each experience has provided Hilary with ideas to enrich her teaching program and practice. Using knowledge gained from her travels also contributed to Hilary completing a Bachelor of Education and Masters in Education. These studies constantly challenged her thinking, sustaining Hilary's interest and belief in early childhood education.

Work conditions associated to teaching has also contributed to Hilary's occupational motivation, allowing her to support her family while her husband was

studying fulltime, to pursue outdoor interests and to travel extensively in holiday breaks. At her current school Hilary has also benefited from the support of the administration, receiving paid Long Service Leave every 6 years and being given scholarships to further her studies. Hilary finds her conditions of employment compliment her personal lifestyle, allowing her to maintain a life-work balance.

Hilary has faced each of her teaching experiences with a positive attitude, looking for a challenge that will stimulate her thinking, intrinsically motivating her to continue teaching. Reading professional literature, travelling extensively and pursuing further studies have contributed to Hilary's occupational motivation, as have the work conditions associated to teaching. Hilary also continues to be motivated to teach through her desire to contribute to children's learning and development.

Hilary's Effective Teaching Practices

Hilary has always considered herself a competent teacher. At the same time Hilary is intrinsically motivated to improve her teaching practice and accountability, stating "teaching is a teaching-learning process" (Hilary, Interview#4, 29/10/04, p. 80).

Hilary's knowledge of child development and the learning domains has been the foundation for the implementation of effective teaching practice in the classroom. Knowledge acquired in pre-service training provided Hilary with a firm grounding in early childhood pedagogy. Reading educational literature has strengthened and extended Hilary's knowledge of early childhood philosophies and educational practice. A strong advocate of the Project Approach, Hilary adopted this practice early in her career, using knowledge gained from reading, "I took small steps. To be able to use a project and focus on it and to link all your learning to it was very exciting!" (Hilary, Interview#4, 29/10/04, p. 79).

Involving students' families in her teaching program has also been an ongoing part of Hilary's effective teaching practice. This strategy enables Hilary to engage in a diverse range of social interactions, provide close supervision and

observation of her students and offer a varied and rich teaching program; factors that contribute to her sustaining effective teaching practice.

Working in a range of educational settings in her first 10 years of teaching, Hilary became aware of the diversity of students' needs and the value of early childhood education. In particular, her experiences of children with learning difficulties strengthened Hilary's belief that critical learning takes place in students early years, stating "I was just very interested and I started to realise the beginnings were so important… If you don't get that firm foundation, then you've got big problems" (Hilary, Interview#1, 17/9/04, p. 15). Consequently, part of Hilary's teaching role is to be a close observer of children, identifying their level of development and potential for growth. Hilary incorporates child-centred learning into her practice, combining her interests and theirs with her knowledge of child development, to provide a learning environment stimulating both for herself and her students. This practice further contributes to Hilary's sustainment as an early childhood teacher.

Hilary's travels and visits to early childhood centres in different countries have also impacted on her teaching:

> I saw it as part of professional development. It was simply on the basis that I've always felt I've gained something from everywhere that I've worked. China taught me so much. I went into homes of families and into child care situations. And at that stage they were so much more advanced than what I'd seen elsewhere… The excursions I take my kids out on, the opportunities to do projects. I saw a lot of that in Sweden….There are just some things you can't put a price on. You come back and absorb these ideas and they become part of your teaching as well. (Hilary, Interview#1, 17/9/04, p. 21).

These opportunities have allowed Hilary to observe how to implement innovative philosophies and strategies into practice. This observational learning is a source of reflection and reinforces Hilary's knowledge acquired through reading, sustaining her motivation and delivery of effective teaching practice.

In addition, professional development sessions, such as First Steps Literacy sessions, and opportunities for collegiality with early childhood colleagues at shared-interest groups have further supported Hilary's sustainment of a productive

pedagogy. Having travelled to Reggio Emilia, Italy, and observed their approach to early childhood education, Hilary sustains her commitment to this approach through attending an interest group and reading further on the topic. It is this combination of strategies that empowers Hilary to continue to implement a Reggio-inspired Project Approach as her teaching practice.

Hilary's effective teaching practice is based on a strong grounding in child development, which has been extended and sustained through reading, travel, reflection and the experience of teaching. It is also Hilary's ability to be an observer of children, and her willingness to modify her teaching practice that has contributed to her ability to maintain a stimulating and innovative learning program for her students.

Hilary's Coping with Daily Demands of Teaching

Hilary stated:

> Being organised is important for me to be able to function. Can I just say here, that it has its' implications and that it's basically part of my motivation. I'm quite a perfectionist, and that in many ways can be a disadvantage, but I can't change my nature. I've always been rather like that. (Hilary, Interview#5, 18/10/04, p. 99).

Hilary copes with the daily demands of teaching, through thorough preparation, knowing what level her students are at and what she wants to achieve.

Devoting time to what she considers important is a feature of Hilary's teaching practice. Hilary is prepared to work out-of-school hours and take work home, such as planning and accountability documentation, "making learning visible" (Hilary, Interview#2, 28/9/04, p. 32). Hilary arrives at school at least an hour before her students to prepare for the school day, and stays after the school day is finished to work on displays and learning journeys associated to her Project Approach. Hilary is flexible in her time management and expectations of what should be achieved in the school day, accommodating her teaching practice to children's interest and energy levels. These strategies allow Hilary to focus on her first priority: her students.

Although planning formats have changed over her teaching career, Hilary continues to plan in detail, having learnt the value of planning in her first teaching position. Conferring with her EA for ideas, Hilary outlines what she wants to achieve in her teaching schedule, keeping a Weekly Overview as a written guide. Observations and changes to the schedule are duly noted, but it is having a structure to work from that enables Hilary to be flexible in her time allocation and teaching practice, coping with the daily demands associated to her work.

An essential component of Hilary's teaching is the involvement of parents in learning sessions. Hilary devolves responsibility to the Parent Coordinator, to organise a parent roster, "They round up my parents and talk to them and convince them to be a parent helper and they usually do" (Hilary, Interview#5, 18/11/04, p. 104). A parent newsletter is sent home each term, outlining proposed excursions and incursions. Parents are also encouraged to attend evening meetings or learning journeys at the end of a given project. Although these practices involve additional work, Hilary is prepared to devote time to this practice, as part of her accountability process and her belief in "parents as partners" (Hilary, Interview#1, 17/9/04, p. 4). Without parental cooperation Hilary would not be able to offer a diverse range of learning activities or organise excursions and home visits, practices she is not willing to forgo.

Hilary has found that to maintain her competence in teaching she must keep physically and emotionally fit. Outside her professional life Hilary is involved in a diverse range of activities, including physical pursuits, travel and her husband's business. Supportive people, including her family, further contribute to Hilary's emotional fitness:

> I probably have the best partner and husband and the most wonderful kids that I can talk to. And I think you do need to. Plus terrific people that I work with, that we can talk about things. And there will be times when people challenge you… and you need to be able to talk about some of these things. (Hilary, Interview#4, 29/10/04, p. 82).

Discourse with others and having a sympathetic listener allows Hilary to put her concerns into perspective and cope with demands associated to her teaching.

In adhering to the School's philosophies Hilary feels supported in her work environment, empowered with the autonomy to teach how and what she believes in. Hilary accepts that not all people, particularly parents, share her beliefs regarding teaching:

> There are times when we have people, and I know that really, quite honestly, that perhaps they would be better in another situation, because they don't want to embrace our philosophy to that extent. And so there are challenging moments where I'm prepared to discuss it with them. However, ultimately I'm not going to be pushed into doing things that are not professionally what I want. (Hilary, Interview#4, 29/10/04, p. 82).

Sustained by her strong personal belief system about the value of early childhood education, Hilary is able to rationalise any conflict she encounters and maintain her commitment to teaching.

Hilary has coped with the daily demands of teaching for over 39 years through being organised and prepared. Hilary's willingness to devote additional time to planning and being flexible in her daily practice allows her to cope with the demands related to her work. The involvement of parents in her program has been a key component of her innovative teaching practice, accountability process and coping mechanism. Keeping physically and emotionally fit, travelling and having an active social life has also contributed to Hilary's teaching sustainment, as has her being supported by her School's philosophy and ability to be autonomous in her teaching practice. Hilary has also found the daily demands related to teaching are incidental, as, "I actually enjoy what I'm doing and if I didn't I wouldn't do it" (Hilary, Interview#3, 11/10/04, p. 69).

Hilary's Coping with Educational Change

Considering the adoption of educational change to be part of her role as a teacher, Hilary is proactive in her approach:

> As soon as Outcome Education was bandied, I started thinking about it, and looking at it and working with people, like my co-teacher and colleagues…I try to look at what it involves, delve into what it means. And then, if I know it's going to come in, then I won't fight it. I would just embrace it, and then link what I want with it. (Hilary, Interview#4, 29/10/04, p. 83).

Having a positive attitude to educational change has allowed Hilary to cope with the demands associated with implementation.

Consequently, Hilary attends professional development sessions and reads educational articles on proposed changes. Hilary is also prepared to ask other people, including colleagues and pre-service teachers, for advice. Taking time to reflect on acquired information allows Hilary to link proposed changes to her current teaching practice.

Having worked the last 29 years in a relatively stable teaching environment contributes to Hilary's coping strategies. The support she receives from her administration and colleagues makes the change process easier:

> Where you come into a situation where you are actually encouraged to make changes, you are encouraged to do additional studies, you are rewarding by doing it, not that that's a motivation for doing it. I don't, I didn't feel I did something because I had to. I did it because I wanted to! But I think working within a system, such as here, just allows you to be the kind of person you want to be! (Hilary, Interview#4, 29/10/04, p. 84).

With the School's support, Hilary has accessed scholarships and taken time-off for educational studies, embracing change as part of her teaching philosophy. Within the School, teachers are respectful of each other's teaching pedagogy, learning from each other and sharing a common vision of what should be achieved. These factors contribute to Hilary coping with issues related to educational change.

For Hilary, educational change is a facet of teaching. Working in a stable and supportive environment has enabled Hilary to be proactive and use information acquired from reading, professional development sessions, work-colleagues and her travels to implement educational change into her teaching practice.

Hilary's Critical Experiences in Sustainment

Hilary stated "I always focus on the positive" (Hilary, Interview#4, 29/10/04, p. 86), finding each teaching experience has had its' rewards. Focussing on her students and their development has stimulated and sustained Hilary's teaching practice throughout her teaching career.

In her first years of teaching, line-manager support, in the form of the Infant School Mistress, enabled Hilary to develop her organisational skills, a strategy that has sustained Hilary when coping with the daily demands associated to teaching.

Diverse teaching experiences have provided professional challenges, sustaining Hilary's occupational motivation. Of significance was Hilary's teaching experience in England, working with low achieving students:

> That was a life changing moment! Really, in so many ways because these children were told, I was told, these children were hopeless. So that really made me work very hard to make sure that they did. The parents didn't come in because the view was that they watched soapies, because nobody had really wanted them. When they came in their esteem went up. So just the whole situation of knowing I was making a difference was just really good! (Hilary, Interview# 5, 18/11/04, p. 90).

Inviting parents into her classroom, Hilary was able involve 15 parents in the learning program and make significant progress with the students. Hilary was sustained in this experience by her positive attitude and educational beliefs.

Professional experiences outside of the classroom have also impacted on Hilary's sustainment in teaching, strengthening her knowledge of child development and early childhood education. Time spent working at a university with children with learning difficulties and voluntary work with the Head Start Project have contributed to Hilary valuing education in children's early years, their "beginnings" (Hilary, Interview#5, 17/9/04, p. 91). These experiences strengthened Hilary's commitment to early childhood education.

The support given by her School's administration has lead to Hilary being able to travel extensively and observe innovations in early childhood settings in different countries. Her observations of social learning and integration of children with special needs into schools was inspirational and led Hilary to complete post-graduate studies, further sustaining Hilary's occupational motivation and commitment to her chosen profession.

At her current school Hilary continues to be rewarded each year from observing the development of her students, both short and long term. Teaching Pre-Primary level has being particularly rewarding as Hilary finds there are the students

make significant growth at this level. Teaching in an early childhood setting and supportive work environment has continued to provide Hilary with job satisfaction and sustainment in her teaching career.

Hilary's Summary

Hilary has been sustained in her teaching practice through being willing to accept the responsibilities associated with her chosen career. Thorough preparation and extending her pedagogical knowledge through reading, travel and further study are factors that have sustained Hilary's professional commitment to teaching.

Working with people in a social context and observing the growth and development of her students has contributed to Hilary's job satisfaction, as has the ability to work in educational settings where Hilary has been given the autonomy to practice what she believes. Always being prepared to work hard and undertake new challenges Hilary has continued to be motivated in her teaching through her readings and her travels.

Hilary has developed and sustained effective teaching practices from profession reading, observational learning and the experience of teaching. Having followed the Project Approach since the commencement of her teaching career Hilary continues to adapt her teaching practices, implementing a Reggio-inspired approach to meet the needs and interests of students. Hilary's intrinsic motivation and desire to be a competent teacher has sustained Hilary's effective teaching practices in the classroom.

In order to cope with the daily demands of teaching Hilary devotes time to planning and preparation, involving parents in her teaching program as a means of providing a diverse and stimulating learning program. Hilary also maintains her physical and emotional fitness and leads an active life outside of teaching, in order to remain self-motivated, indirectly sustaining her practice of teaching.

Having a positive attitude towards teaching and the implementation of educational change has enabled Hilary to proactively seek information from various sources then reflect and link it to her teaching practice. Having taught for a long

period of time in one location has also contributed to Hilary's ability to cope with change, maintain a life-work balance and sustain herself as a teacher. Hilary's enjoyment of teaching and her desire to be competent in her career contributed to Hilary adapting, evolving and being sustained as an early childhood teacher in the classroom.

Summary of the Case Studies

The case studies provided a revealing insight into the beliefs and daily teaching practice of six experienced early childhood teachers. All participants demonstrated a strong commitment to their profession and willingness to engage in lifelong learning to extend and sustain their practice of teaching.

A strong driving force to sustaining these early childhood teachers was their job satisfaction, sustained through daily interaction with their young students, and observation of students' growth and development. Interest in their students' wellbeing led these teachers to modify their teaching pedagogy and practice, implementing and sustaining an effective learning program. Belief in the value of early childhood education and a strong pedagogical knowledge contributed to these participants' self-efficacy, and competency in the classroom. Intrinsically motivated to extend themselves as learners, case study participants indicated they sought change and challenges in their teaching career to remain motivated and committed to their career. Autonomy of practice also contributed to productive engagement in their profession and ability to remain motivated.

Reading educational literature, engaging in professional discourse with like-minded colleagues, attending early childhood educational functions and affiliation with interest groups and professional associations sustained these teachers' professional commitment, occupational motivation, effective teaching practice in the classroom and ability to cope with educational change. Collaborative practice and mentor relationships within the school also contributed to their sustainment, as did use of routines and adjusting their teaching practices to meet their own needs, and those of their students.

Case study participants also indicated reflective thinking allowed them to develop realistic expectations of themselves, modify their teaching practices and rationalise educational change. Self-awareness led these teachers to strive to maintain a balance in their lives, so that they could remain teaching effectively in the classroom.

The findings revealed in this chapter are discussed in more detail in the following chapter and are compared to the findings which arose from the first phase of data collection and the reviewed literature.

CHAPTER SEVEN: DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

This study set out to investigate the factors that contribute to early childhood teachers' sustainment in their profession and teaching in the classroom. Utilising qualitative methodology, data were collated in two phases: phase one, which involved surveys and focus group discussions and phase two, which involved six case studies of early childhood teachers who had each taught more than 20 years in the classroom. The findings arising from analysis of the data are discussed in this chapter, with reference to educational literature and research.

Based on the study's research questions, this chapter examines factors contributing to early childhood teachers being sustained in their profession, maintaining professional commitment, job satisfaction, occupational motivation and sustainment during critical teaching incidents. Key factors arising from the data included students, work colleagues and professional peers, the early childhood work environment and work conditions, and early childhood teachers' beliefs and attitudes, as well as parents, line managers and resources.

This chapter also discusses factors which contributed to early childhood teachers sustaining engagement in their daily teaching, maintaining effective teaching practice and coping with the daily demands of teaching and the implementation of educational change. Key factors arising from the data included work colleagues, students, sources of support, early childhood teachers' attitudes and dispositions, health and well-being and early childhood teachers' pedagogical practices. Other factors expanded on include early childhood teachers' conditions of employment, resources and the experience of teaching.

Finally, a summary of the key findings emerging from this investigation is provided, highlighting the contribution this study brings to knowledge of teachers working in early childhood education and their sustainment within the teaching profession.

Experienced Early Childhood Teachers

Although this study conducted two phases of data collection to gather information pertaining the early childhood teachers' sustainment, the second phase of data collection was particularly significant in providing in-depth descriptions regarding the nature of early childhood teachers' work and sustainment. In conducting case studies this study was able to describe factors that otherwise may have been overlooked. Through recounting their professional lives, daily teaching practice, beliefs and ideologies these experienced early childhood teachers portrayed the realities of working in the teaching profession for an extended period of time and what they considered was significant to their long-term sustainment in teaching.

In particular, case study participants were able to describe particular traits of their students and how their daily practice contributed to their sustaining job satisfaction. Furthermore, these teachers were able to describe their educational beliefs and how they modified their teaching practice to accommodate their beliefs, student needs and commitments to be sustained in their daily teaching. The case study participants were also able to explain why their engagement in their profession fluctuated over the course of their professional lives, and how they sustained their beliefs in the value of early childhood teaching, a commitment to the profession, even when other responsibilities in their lives had to take precedence.

These experienced teachers revealed that sustainment is more than continuance in a profession. For these teachers, teacher sustainment is about finding out what you believe in and enjoy doing then seeking ways to sustain your beliefs and enjoyment. In addition, for these teachers, teacher sustainment is also about taking care of yourself and balancing commitments: doing what you can, when you can. Consequently, teacher sustainment is not just about maintaining a high level of engagement in the profession for an extended period of time.

The experienced early childhood teachers in this study demonstrated that while their engagement in the profession varied over the course of their professional lives, their commitment, or belief in the profession did not. This finding leads to the question: should teachers' professional commitment be defined on the basis of their actual involvement in the profession? The evidence in this study refutes two known

models of teachers' career development (Huberman, 1993; Katz, 1972), that indicate teacher commitment changes in the course of teachers' careers. Is it possible that their measure of teacher commitment is teacher involvement? These are issues that merit further investigation.

This study also reveals that there still exist teachers in the profession who remain committed to their profession and passionate about their teaching. In reviewing the literature, where the focus was on the negative aspects of teaching, including teacher job dissatisfaction, disillusionment, stress, burnout and attrition (Lock, 1993; Scott, Cox et al., 1999; Vandenberghe & Huberman, 1999; Wiley, 2000; Xin & MacMillan, 1999), it was easy to assume that the teaching profession is in a state of decline. The case study participants indicated otherwise, revealing that teachers can still sustain job satisfaction, professional commitment, occupational motivation and effective teaching practice if they take the time to reflect and prioritize in their lives what is rewarding, engaging and fulfilling about their profession.

The early childhood teachers involved in the case studies demonstrated that teacher sustainment is also a matter of attitude and choice. The attitude teachers choose to have towards their profession, their teaching practice, their teaching duties and educational change determines what satisfaction they will derive from teaching and engagement in the profession. The participants in the case studies clearly identified that concern about their students took precedence over any issues related to work pressure and change management. Other teachers may do well to identify what factors they should prioritize in their professional lives, to enhance their sustainment in the profession and in teaching.

Early Childhood Teachers' Sustainment in the Teaching Profession

Sustainment in the teaching profession is a complex issue. Traits associated with professional sustainment, including professional commitment, job satisfaction and occupational motivation have been the topic of extensive investigation (Eick, 2002; Inman & Marlow, 2004; Milner, 2002; Scott et al., 2002; Shann, 1998; Woods & Weasmer, 2002). Such studies have revealed that a range of factors, both external and internal, impact on teachers' continuance and engagement in the profession.

This study provides further supporting evidence that multiple rather than singular factors contribute to teachers' sustainment in the profession. Participants in this study nominated several factors when answering questions pertaining to their sustainment of professional commitment, job satisfaction and occupational motivation. For these teachers a range of factors impacted on their professional sustainment, including their students, work colleagues and professional peers, their work environment and work conditions, and their attitudes and beliefs. The availability of resources and interactions with parents and school administrators also influenced early childhood teachers' professional sustainment in varying degrees, according to each teacher's unique experiences and knowledge.

Also evident in this study was that factors sustaining participants' job satisfaction also impact on other traits of sustainment. Many first phase participants repeatedly nominated the same factors when answering questions pertaining to different traits of sustainment. Job satisfaction was also named by eight participants as a factor sustaining their occupational motivation. Likewise, case study participants revealed that enjoyment of their teaching role contributed to their active engagement in the profession, both in and outside the classroom, as well as their pursuit of knowledge and continuance in teaching. Although research verifies that job satisfaction is a determinant of professional commitment and productive engagement in teaching (Firestone & Pennell, 1993; Milner, 2002; Shann, 1998), few have emphasised the critical role job satisfaction plays in teachers' sustainment (Lokan, 2003; Stanford, 2001). Enjoying what you are doing has the potential to minimize the impact of stress-related factors on teachers' self-efficacy and esteem, thereby enhancing teachers' emotional intelligence and ability to cope with change (Gold & Roth, 1993; Goleman, 1995, 1998) and their continuance in teaching. This study's findings indicate that for many early childhood teachers job satisfaction is crucial to their sustainment in the profession.

Key factors sustaining job satisfaction, professional commitment and occupational motivation of early childhood teachers in this study are further described and discussed below.

Students

The findings of this investigation indicate that the actual nature of early childhood teaching itself, working with young children, contributes to early childhood teachers' sustainment in the profession. The majority of participants in this study, including nearly three-quarters of first phase participants and all of the case study participants, identified that their students and the relationships they develop with students are a major influence on their job satisfaction, commitment and occupational motivation. As one case study participant, Gwen, stated:

> If I hadn't enjoyed their company (the students) I wouldn't have stayed. I think that's really one of the most, one of the key factors of sustainability. You have to like kids. And you have to like sharing your time with them. (Gwen, Interview#4, 21/6/04, p. 47).

Early childhood teachers involved in both phases of the study made similar comments, disclosing that their love of young children and enjoyment of students' innocence and enthusiasm for learning contributed to their professional sustainment.

Students play an important part in teachers' working lives and are often the reason many people choose to join the teaching profession. The characteristics of young students make them engaging to work with, while observing student growth and development provides teachers with visual affirmation of their teaching efforts. Furthermore, an interest in student well-being led many early childhood teachers in this study to extend their commitment and engagement in the profession and motivated them to improve their pedagogical knowledge and practice so that they can continue to make a difference to students' lives.

Prior research has affirmed that in focussing on their prime responsibility, the students, resilient teachers remain committed to the teaching profession (Patterson, Collins, & Abbott, 2004; Stanford, 2001). The reviewed literature, however, fails to disclose the specific traits that make students appealing to teachers. Potentially unique to this study, many of the participating early childhood teachers described the characteristics of students that make them engaging to work with, including innocence, enthusiasm, spontaneity, humour and youth. Student naivety, innocence and humour allows early childhood teachers to view the world from another perspective, to appreciate simple attributes of life, which place daily stresses and concerns into perspective. As one case study participant, Grace, commented:

> As soon as you walk in the room, all your worries leave you behind. It's just the joy, the honesty of working with them, with young children. What they say, the humour, the fun, the laughter they give you. (Grace, Interview#4, 30/8/04, p. 61).

Shared laughter and daily interaction with persons possessing positive characteristics and dispositions enhances early childhood teachers' daily teaching experiences and promotes a positive work environment, sustaining job satisfaction and raising the perception that early childhood teaching is a sustaining profession.

This study also found that when participants felt they had made a contribution to student growth and development they were more likely to experience job satisfaction and professional commitment. Nearly half of the first phase participants and all of the case study participants nominated that their observation of student growth and development further promoted their professional sustainment. As one case study participant, Mel, observed:

> I really enjoy working with the very young children because you can see the difference that what you do makes…I like working with year ones because they come in not reading and writing and they go out with some development in that area. (Mel, Interview#4, 27/9/04, p. 58).

Prior research has also identified that the ability to make a difference to students' lives contributes to teachers' job satisfaction and commitment (Department of Education and Training, 2003a; Lokan, 2003). However, what has also been noted in this study is the unique position early childhood teachers are in of being able to observe the significant progress students make in their early years of development, especially in the acquisition of literacy and numeracy skills. In particular, the early childhood practice of closely observing students at work and at play enhances early childhood teachers' ability to receive visual affirmation of their teaching efforts. In this study, intense involvement in student growth and development is seen as a reinforcer of participants' sense of worth and achievement, sustaining their job satisfaction and commitment to early childhood education.

The participants in this study also focussed on the positive characteristics of their students. Even when recounting negative critical teaching experiences, participants still acknowledged individual students' progress, particularly in the areas of social and emotional development. By maintaining a positive approach and

developing realistic expectations teachers were intrinsically rewarded by observing the small gains made by particular students. In addition, through concentrating on the wellbeing and development of the "whole" child across the learning domains, a practice in keeping with early childhood educational philosophy, early childhood teachers in this study sustained motivation and commitment to their profession during critical teaching incidences.

Sustainment in the teaching profession relies on teachers possessing a positive disposition towards their students. Enjoying children's company and developing healthy relationships with students, as well as having an interest in children's development and wellbeing appears to be fundamental to not only identifying and catering for students' needs, a quality attributed to effective teaching (Ryan & Cooper, 2000), but also to sustainment in early childhood education.

Work Colleagues and Professional Peers

This study also identified work colleagues, including education assistants and same-year level teachers, as well as professional peers as key factors sustaining early childhood teachers. In particular, nearly three-quarters of the first phase participants and three case study participants in this investigation found that the relationships they developed with their work colleagues enhanced their job satisfaction. Participants indicated that they valued sharing teaching roles, collaborating and receiving support from their work colleagues, particularly during critical teaching incidences. Case study participants, Barbara, Grace and Hilary made strong reference to the positive relationships developed with work colleagues furthering enjoyment of their teaching practice. As Hilary stated:

> I couldn't be as happy if I was working alone in a classroom, and that's probably one of the reasons I've stayed... I probably wouldn't be happy if I was in a room and didn't have that sharing. (Hilary, Interview#4, 29/10/04, p. 73).

Working in an environment where an education assistant is present facilitated early childhood teachers receiving moral and physical support on a daily basis. The presence of another adult offered an opportunity to engage in social and professional discourse, catering for teachers' innate desire for social contact. Furthermore, working with an education assistant allowed these teachers to share the

more mundane or onerous tasks associated with teaching, enhancing their daily practice and sustaining their job satisfaction.

The ability to develop harmonious work relationships with colleagues inevitably influences job satisfaction, a finding supported in the reviewed literature (Brunetti, 2001; Lokan, 2003; Scott, Dinham et al., 1999). However, past research does not appear to have identified, or singled out, how significant this factor is to early childhood teachers' professional sustainment. As early childhood teachers work in an environment where another adult is ever present, part of their teaching role requires them to maintain a harmonious work relationship with their education assistant to ensure student learning takes place. Potentially, more so than in other sectors of the teaching profession, the relationships early childhood teachers develop with work colleagues determines their sustainment of job satisfaction and continuance in the profession.

In addition, networking and working collaboratively with professional peers facilitated many participants extending their engagement in the profession. All of the case study participants indicated that they actively sought contact with like-minded peers outside the classroom, affiliating with professional associations and attending professional development sessions and conferences in out-of-school hours. As early childhood teachers often teach in relative isolation, in locations set apart from mainstream teachers and other early childhood educators, the desire to seek contact with professional peers is driven by their need to belong and feel part of the teaching community. Engagement in professional activities allowed early childhood teachers to gain new ideas, affirm their own pedagogy and practice and strengthen their self-efficacy and occupational motivation. While these practices are recommended in the literature as facilitating teachers' abilities to cope with educational change (Department of Education and Training, 2003b; Hargreaves et al., 2001), in this study associating with professional peers and engaging in professional activities contributed to participants' sustainment in the profession.

Furthermore, at some stage in their teaching careers, five of the case study participants revealed that developing a mentor-relationship with a work colleague, professional peer or school administrator enhanced their sustainment. Mentor-

relationships acted as a form of professional support, providing teachers with an empathetic person with whom to share concerns and place teaching-related issues into perspective. Sharing ideas with a like-minded person also contributed to strengthening their pedagogical beliefs and understandings, confirming their self-worth as effective teachers. Through developing mentor-relationships teachers were stimulated to remain actively engaged in the profession, sustaining their professional commitment and occupational motivation. In this study, mentor-relationships also led experienced teachers to extend their engagement in the profession, take on additional roles outside the classroom, broaden their professional reading, engage in reflective thinking and explore different teaching practices and philosophies. Recommended in the literature as rejuvenating occupational motivation and professional commitment (Moore, 2001; Yeager, 2003; Yoo, 2002), such practices are also promoted as a means to raise standards of teaching competency in Australia (Committee for the Review of Teaching and Teacher Education, 2003a).

Teachers seek contact, acceptance and support from those they associate with or have common professional interests and backgrounds. In this study the participating early childhood teachers identified that the positive relationships they develop with work colleagues and professional peers fulfilled their needs, providing a professional context within which to discuss current issues and practices and enabling them to reflect and be part of a learning community. Collegiality, mentor-relationships and social contact promoted participants' job satisfaction and contributed to their sustainment in the early childhood profession. Other sectors of the teaching profession may well benefit from investigating the role work colleagues, particularly education assistants, play in contributing to job satisfaction and professional commitment so that they too are sustained in their chosen profession.

Early Childhood Work Conditions and Environment

The findings of this study also suggest that the nature of early childhood teachers' work environments, work practices and work conditions contributes to sustainment in early childhood education.

Nearly half of this study's participants related pragmatic reasons for remaining in teaching, such as the need for an income, the work hours and school holidays. These factors allowed participants to accommodate personal commitments and to maintain a life-work balance. In addition, all of the case study participants revealed that their work conditions allowed them to pursue other goals and ambitions, such as study, competitive sport and travel, which, in turn, sustained their occupational motivation. Although there is strong evidence in the literature to suggest that factors such as low pay and poor work conditions contribute to teacher attrition (Danielson, 2002; Darling-Hammond, 2003), in this study teachers' work conditions contributed to their sustainment. In particular, nearly a third of the first phase participants indicated that their income met their basic needs and expenses. Generally, participants also found the work hours, leave entitlements and school holidays were suited to raising a family and meeting personal commitments. For these early childhood teachers, their work conditions provided both extrinsic and intrinsic rewards, facilitating a life-work balance and contributing to participants' perceptions that early childhood teaching provides work conditions that are conducive to sustainment.

Professional autonomy was also nominated by nearly half of the participants in this study as facilitating their sustainment of occupational motivation and commitment. As one case study participant, Rachel stated, "I'm lucky here, in that I think that early childhood teachers are not that directed. They tend to be left to do want they want to do" (Rachel, Interview#2, 18/6/04, p. 24). Participants commented on having the autonomy and freedom to try different things, to vary their timetable, to use creativity of mind, and being able to make their own decisions. Case study participants indicated that they were generally afforded the freedom and flexibility to implement preferred pedagogical practices and make their own decisions regarding the purchasing of required resources. Professional autonomy, a feature of their teaching practice, may be due to many early childhood teachers often being accommodated in buildings set apart from other educational services and operating with a relative degree of financial autonomy, within the constraints of the school budget. As such, early childhood teachers enjoy a degree of control over decision-making which directly affects their teaching practice.

In addition, all of these early childhood teachers indicated they were sustained through variety, flexibility and change in their teaching practice and career paths. Intrinsic motivation and love of learning led these experienced teachers to actively seek new challenges, trialling different approaches and varying pedagogical practices in their daily teaching. As Grace, a case study participant, stated:

> Staying motivated, I need change… I keep creating new things all the time to work with the children. Looking for new ideas of what to do" (Grace, Interview#4, 30/8/04, p. 62).

Participants indicated that their occupational motivation was sustained through changing work locations every few years, teaching different year levels or taking on different teaching roles. However, for some participants a stable work location was important, providing a basis on which to implement flexibility and variety in their daily teaching practice. For these early childhood teachers workplace stability also enabled them to observe the long-term progress of their students, strengthening their job satisfaction and commitment to the profession. Not evident in the reviewed literature, and potentially unique to this study, stability of location also empowered these early childhood teachers to feel secure when coping with the implementation of educational change or in adopting different teaching roles and practices. Regardless of whether participants preferred a stable location, or not, this study found that the work conditions associated with early childhood teaching facilitate teacher-initiated change. Working in an environment which allows teachers to pursue change and challenges in their professional lives also promotes teachers' sustainment of occupational motivation and engagement in the profession.

For the early childhood teachers in this study the work conditions associated with early childhood teaching are conducive to professional sustainment, catering for early childhood teachers' personal commitments and intrinsic desire for variety, change and challenges in their professional lives. Autonomy and flexibility of practice also appear to enhance teachers' ownership of their teaching roles, further contributing to their sustainment in early childhood education.

Early Childhood Teachers' Attitudes and Beliefs

Analysis of the data reveals that the comments made by participants in this study were based upon their attitudes and beliefs towards teaching. Also disclosed in

this study was how participant's self-awareness and desire to maintain a life-work balance impacted on their professional sustainment.

In this study, the term "making a difference" arose as a factor sustaining nearly a third of the participating early childhood teachers' professional commitment and job satisfaction. This belief was enhanced by participants observing noticeable evidence of students' progress, and the impact their teaching had on students' families. For these early childhood teachers, teaching is more than a job, it is a vocation, a caring profession with social responsibilities. Making a difference has also been reported in previous research as contributing to teacher sustainment (Department of Education and Training, 2003a; Lokan, 2003). This study's findings indicate that participants are motivated and sustained by altruistic beliefs, convinced that early childhood teaching is socially worthwhile.

Furthermore, this study's experienced early childhood teachers all expressed strong opinions about the value of early childhood education and how their own adherence to particular educational philosophies and strength of conviction sustained them both on a daily basis and through critical teaching experiences. All of these teachers had developed a strong grounding in early childhood philosophies and pedagogy, from either pre-service training, or through professional reading and additional studies. Mentor relationships and collaboration with professional peers further strengthened their beliefs and sustained their commitment to early childhood teaching. Strength of educational belief appeared to reinforce teachers' perseverance in the face of adversity and furthered their engagement in professional activities beyond the classroom. While the literature emphasises the need for teachers to develop expertise in pedagogical knowledge (Committee for the Review of Teaching and Teacher Education, 2003a; Department of Education and Training, 2003b; Riner, 2000), little has been done to investigate how teachers' educational beliefs contribute to their continuance in teaching. In this study, strength of educational belief not only impacted on participants' teaching practice, but also sustained their professional commitment and engagement in the profession.

Strength of belief and sound pedagogical knowledge also contributed to teachers' self-efficacy, further enhancing their sustainment in the profession. Self-

efficacy, “belief in one’s capabilities to organise and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments” (Bandura, 1997, p. 3), empowered participants to be confident and persevere in critical teaching experiences. Several participants in this study indicated that they were sustained by the belief that they were knowledgeable and competent teachers and worked in an occupation to which they were suited. While the literature links self-efficacy to job satisfaction (Bandura, 1997; Caprara et al., 2003), in this study self-efficacy also appears to be a factor sustaining nearly a third of this study’s early childhood teachers in their profession.

Intrinsic motivation, a desire to improve performance, act on opportunities and persist in pursuing goals (Goleman, 1998, p. 26) also arose as a factor facilitating eleven participants’ professional sustainment. Participants in both phases of this investigation indicated that they were intrinsically motivated to improve their pedagogical knowledge and practices, to maintain their professional focus and teaching competencies. Intrinsic motivation led these teachers to become lifelong learners, to attend professional development sessions, read educational literature and seek out experts in their field. For the experienced early childhood teachers in this study, intrinsic motivation also contributed to their affiliating with educational associations, taking on different teaching roles and actively seeking change and challenges in their teaching career, actions recommended in the literature to maintain professional commitment and occupational motivation (Day, 1999a; Moore, 2001; Yoo, 2002). This study concurs with the literature, identifying intrinsic motivation as a factor that strengthens participants’ engagement and sustainment in the profession.

The case study participants also spoke about how they strived to find a balance in their lives, develop realistic expectations of themselves and modify their teaching practice to accommodate personal and work-related commitments. In this study participants’ professional engagement fluctuated, in keeping with Steffy and Wolfe’s (2001, p. 16) professional life cycle of teachers. Teachers appeared to move back and forth between the professional, expert and distinguished phases of professional development, depending on their level of engagement in the profession and the particular circumstances at that time. This finding was in contrast to work by

Huberman (1993) and Katz (1972) who indicate that teachers' commitment is more linear and either diminishes or increases with time.

Early childhood teachers reported that they maintained a strong allegiance to early childhood education. However, their ability to commit to and engage in professionally-orientated activities varied over the course of their professional lives. For many of the participants in this study, the vast majority being female, active engagement in the profession fluctuated as they strove to fulfil their roles as mothers, wives, friends, mentors and teachers. As Mel, a case study participant stated "I do the best I can, in the time I have. I do tend to take into account though, that fact that I have a life outside of school" (Mel, Interview#4, 27/9/04, p. 57). Self-awareness, the ability to know personal strengths and limitations, led participants to develop realistic expectations of their own capabilities. This emotional competency allowed participants to reflect and take stock of their teaching career, and level of involvement, prioritising what was important to their beliefs and continuance in teaching. As most case study participants implied, this involved focussing their efforts on meeting their students' needs, a high priority in their professional lives. At the same time, these teachers took into account health-related issues and personal commitments, making adjustments to their teaching practice and professional engagement to maintain a life-work balance.

Teachers work in a socially orientated profession that can be both stimulating and stressful. The attitudes teachers adopt when fulfilling professional commitments determines their ability to cope with the stresses and demands related to their work (Gold & Roth, 1993). Likewise, the degree of satisfaction and sense of achievement teachers derive from their involvement in the profession is determined by their educational beliefs and willingness to engage in professional activities. Early childhood teachers' altruistic beliefs, intrinsic motivation and desire to make a difference to students' lives also contributed to participants' active engagement in the profession and sustainment of job satisfaction, occupational motivation and professional commitment. Furthermore, strength of educational beliefs reinforced participants' commitment to early childhood education and enhanced their self-efficacy, furthering their sustainment in the profession. Self-awareness, realistic expectations and the ability to maintain a life-work balance also determined

participants' productive engagement and continuance in teaching. In this study, early childhood teachers' attitudes and beliefs are identified as key factors contributing to their sustainment in the teaching profession.

Relationships with Parents

This investigation also found that the relationships early childhood teachers develop with parents also contributed to their sustainment in the profession. In this study nearly a quarter of the participants in the first phase of data collection and three of the case study participants indicated that parents' positive comments provided them with affirmation of their teaching efforts, sustaining their job satisfaction and occupational motivation.

Furthermore, parents also featured strongly in the critical teaching experiences of 14 participants, either providing praise and support in positive experiences, or holding conflicting opinions regarding their child's progress, or a teacher's particular teaching style. In negative incidences participants maintained communication with parents, but sought support from within the profession to sustain their beliefs and practice. Seeking support sustained teachers' realistic expectations of themselves and their students, minimizing the negative influence of select parents. In addition, while these negative teaching experiences proved trying, the majority of teacher-parent relationships remained healthy and supportive, contributing to participants' sustainment.

While the literature identifies teachers' relationships with parents as a contributor to teacher dissatisfaction (Shann, 1998; Woods & Weasmer, 2002), this study's findings also indicate that parents have a positive influence on teacher sustainment. As early childhood teachers often have greater contact with parents than in other sectors of teaching, and can be regarded as the inductors of parents into the education system, the relationships they develop with parents may well contribute to their job satisfaction, and ultimate sustainment in their profession.

Other Sustaining Factors

Analysis of the data also other less-common factors as contributing to participants' sustainment of professional commitment, job satisfaction or

occupational motivation. These included the influence of school administrators and resources on professional sustainment. As the study's chosen methodology allowed participants to nominate their own sustaining factors, participants' discretion was relied upon to determine what was important to their sustainment in the profession. Consequently, while some factors may have appeared less frequently in this study, they are still considered sustaining to the participating early childhood teachers who nominated them. Furthermore, such factors may also be significant to other early childhood teachers' professional sustainment.

Line Managers

In this study nearly a quarter of the participants indicated that the verbal praise and commendation they received from school administrators, or line managers, acted as a source of job satisfaction. Line managers, however, had less impact on participants' occupational motivation and professional commitment. Only six of the study's participants identified line managers as a factor sustaining their occupational motivation. Three case study participants, Gwen, Mel and Hilary indicated that particular line managers were influential in sustaining their professional commitment at some stage of their teaching careers: their experiences with line managers were positive and sustaining, a finding in contrast with research identifying that the work-related demands made by line managers can contribute to teacher stress and burnout (Smylie, 1999; Vandenberghe & Huberman, 1999).

The relationships developed with school administrators also featured in participants' critical experiences in sustainment. Negative experiences involving a lack of support from line managers or direct conflict with school administrators were resolved through participants staying true to their beliefs and persevering or relocating to another work location. In contrast, where positive experiences with line managers were reported participants indicated that encouragement and support from line managers led them to expand their professional learning and undertake extended roles within the school. Line managers' empathy for early childhood philosophy and practices reinforced teachers' self efficacies and confirmed their belief in the value of early childhood education. Shared decision-making and democratic leadership also contributed to teachers' sense of empowerment, job satisfaction and active engagement in the profession. Such practices have been recommended in prior

research as a means of promoting teacher engagement and occupational motivation (Davis & Wilson, 2000; Edwards et al., 2002; Rhodes et al., 2004; Woods & Weasmer, 2002). This study demonstrates that while line managers were not a common factor of professional sustainment, their leadership had the capacity to strengthen early childhood teachers' job satisfaction, commitment and motivation.

This study also reveals that line managers appear to be more influential in contributing to sustainment of job satisfaction than other traits of sustainment. While praise and acknowledgement of teaching efforts may not require a high level of contact or effort from line managers, the ability to inspire, direct and engage teachers in the profession does. As many early childhood teachers work in locations set apart from mainstream educational services and operate on a different time schedules their daily contact and involvement with school administrators is reduced. Furthermore, working in an area of the profession in which many line managers have limited knowledge or experience, early childhood teachers tend to be left to their own devices to extend their pedagogical practices and sustain occupational motivation and commitment. In this study, line managers' impact on early childhood teachers' professional sustainment varied according to individual teachers' experiences and the relationships they developed with particularly line managers during the course of their professional lives.

Resources

The availability and use of resources in the classroom was also considered to be a factor impacting on early childhood teachers' sustainment of job satisfaction and professional commitment. Although only ten participants identified resources as a sustaining factor, for these early childhood teachers resources were important and necessary to their sustainment in the profession. The availability and use of resources in the classroom, also identified in research as enhancing sustainment (Lokan, 2003), enabled these teachers to develop aesthetically pleasing and stimulating work environments. The use of resources provided a visual affirmation of their teaching efforts and reinforced their job satisfaction. Furthermore, availability of resources allowed these teachers to implement preferred teaching approaches and learning programs, maintaining their commitment to early childhood ideologies and pedagogical practices.

Line managers and resources are both part of early childhood teachers' work environment. The ways in which early childhood teachers develop relationships or make use of such factors determines how vital they are to their sustainment in their chosen profession. While this study indicates that these factors were not significant to the majority of participants in this study, for those teachers who nominated line managers and resources as contributing to their sustainment these factors are relevant and important to their continuance in teaching.

Summary of Early Childhood Teachers' Professional Sustainment

This study identified that early childhood teachers have a professional focus and that their attitudes and beliefs contribute to sustaining their commitment and involvement in early childhood education. In particular, early childhood teachers' altruistic beliefs, strong educational beliefs, self-efficacy, intrinsic motivation and realistic expectations allowed them to balance commitments and maintain engagement in the teaching profession.

Relationships with students, work colleagues and professional peers were also influential in determining participants' sustainment in the profession, as were their work environments, work conditions and teaching practices, including autonomy and flexibility of practice. To a lesser extent, parents, line managers and resources also contribute to early childhood teachers' professional sustainment. This study also revealed that early childhood teachers' desire and ability to maintain a life-work balance led them to identify, prioritize and act on factors significant to their continuance in teaching, sustaining their job satisfaction, occupational motivation and professional commitment to early childhood education.

Early Childhood Teachers' Sustainment in the Classroom

For teachers to remain productively engaged in their classroom, providing quality education for their students, they employ a range of strategies to facilitate their sustainment. This study sought to identify those factors that contribute to early childhood teachers being sustained in their classrooms, teaching effectively, coping with the daily demands of teaching and the implementation of educational change. Key factors arising from this study's findings include work colleagues, students, sources of support, early childhood teachers' attitudes and dispositions, early

childhood teachers' health and well-being and early childhood teachers' teaching practices. Also discussed are early childhood teachers' conditions of employment, resources and the experience of teaching.

Work Colleagues

In this study work colleagues, both education assistants and professional peers, were key factors contributing to participants' sustainment in the classroom. Professional peers were a major influence on nearly three-quarters of the first phase participants and all of the case study participants sustaining effective teaching practice in the classroom. Receiving practical advice and exchanging ideas with early childhood teachers, either within the school or through attending School District Network Meetings, enhanced participants' pedagogical practice.

Case study participants also revealed that in their first years of teaching, peer and line-manager support was crucial to their sustainment. Although possessing the necessary theoretical knowledge, it was through associating with experienced educators these teachers developed their "personal practical knowledge" (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995, p. 7). In addition, close association with a particular work colleague, a mentor, further extended and sustained case study participants' teaching practice. Shared reading, professional discourse and observation of teaching strategies in process, enhanced these teachers' learning and facilitated a deeper understanding of particular pedagogical approaches, as recommended in the literature (Alexander, 1999; Miller, 2002; Nevills, 2003). This study found that experienced early childhood teachers were selective, in that they formed working relationships with like-minded peers and valued quality advice from those work colleagues who demonstrated a shared commitment or passion towards early childhood education.

Professional peers were also considered critical to over a third of the participants coping with the implementation of educational change in the classroom. Collaboration with professional peers enhanced teachers' understanding of educational changes, promoting a shared vision. Valuing collegiality, these early childhood teachers were empowered by the knowledge that they were not alone and consequently felt positive towards implementing proposed changes. Four of the case

study participants also indicated they were sustained through early involvement and collaboration in the change process, benefiting from learning together. For these teachers, access to experts-in-the-field and informed colleagues made the implementation of change easier. While much has been written about the implementation of change and the role of collaboration (Day, 1997; Fullan, 1998; Hargreaves et al., 2001; Hargreaves & Evans, 1997), it is interesting that this study's findings imply that early childhood teachers, who tend to work in isolation from each other, find that the implementation of educational change brings them together and contributes to sustaining their professional identity.

The relationships formed with professional peers and work colleagues also contributed to participants' sustainment in classroom teaching. Participants reported that engaging in out of school social activities and developing friendships with work colleagues acted as a release from teaching pressures. Even more significant, nearly two-thirds of the participants also revealed that the support of education assistants was critical to their daily continuance in teaching. Education assistants, a common feature of early childhood settings, shared teaching roles and acted as a source of advice, providing ongoing support on a daily basis. Case study participants indicated that when their energy levels were low they were able to rely on their education assistant's increased involvement in the teaching program. Education assistants also contributed to providing supporting evidence of student growth and development, performing classroom chores and liaising with parents, keeping teachers informed of parental concerns and student' issues. As research has not previously investigated early childhood teachers' sustainment, there is no supporting evidence to verify how significant education assistants are to early childhood teachers' sustainment in teaching. In this study, however, education assistants appear to be a key factor of early childhood teachers' sustainment in the classroom.

This study found that professional peers and education assistants are considered significant to early childhood teachers sustaining productive engagement in the classroom. While both groups of work colleagues influenced different aspects of early childhood teachers' professional practice in different ways, both provided a source of support, enabling early childhood teachers to maintain effective teaching

practices, cope with the daily demands of their work and the implementation of educational change.

Students

In this investigation, students were a recurring theme, sustaining early childhood teachers both in their profession and in the classroom. As mentioned previously, daily interaction with young students provided many early childhood teachers with job satisfaction, making their working day enjoyable. This study also found participant desire to meet the needs of their students combined with their intrinsic motivation to sustain their delivery of effective teaching practice in the classroom.

An interest in student welfare motivated over a quarter of the early childhood teachers in this study to extend their effective teaching practice by engaging in professional reading, attending professional development sessions and affiliating with like-minded professionals. Students acted as a source of motivation and inspiration, contributing to participants becoming lifelong learners, building on their pedagogical knowledge in order to address student needs and sustain their productive engagement in the classroom. While the reviewed literature indicates that lifelong learning is desirable and linked to teachers' intrinsic motivation (Alexander, 1999; Livneh & Livneh, 1999; Miller, 2002), what has not previously been identified by research is how teachers' altruistic beliefs act as a source of motivation and promote lifelong learning. In this study, early childhood teachers' attitudes towards their students appear to contribute to their intrinsic motivation, lifelong learning and sustainment of effective teaching practices.

Catering for students' needs also led all of the case study participants to observe their students closely, identify levels of development then implement learning programs suited to student needs. These teachers elaborated on particular educational approaches they adopted, such as child-centred learning, cooperative learning, the Play Best Approach and the Project Approach to sustain their motivation and extend student development. Through implementing various child-centred programs, these teachers took direction from their students' interests and encouraged students to develop independence and participate in daily classroom

routines, reducing the workload for the teacher and education assistant. Consequently, students indirectly facilitated these experienced early childhood teachers' ability to cope with the daily demands of their work and be sustained in their daily teaching.

These findings indicate that working with students plays a significant role in contributing to early childhood teachers sustaining their effective teaching practices, providing job satisfaction, acting as a source of motivation and directing their teaching pedagogy and practice in the classroom.

Sources of Support

Early childhood teachers in this study disclosed that, in working in a socially orientated profession, they are aware of their need to rely on a range of sources for support. As discussed earlier, work colleagues and professional peers were a prime source of support for participants in this study. Over a quarter of the participants also revealed that, in varying degrees, they relied on support from professional resources, school administrators, parents and family and friends to sustain their continuance in teaching.

Professional Resources

Professional development sessions and educational resources, including educational texts, journals and the Internet, were key factors influencing sustainment of effective teaching practice in the classroom and implementation of educational change for participants in this study. In particular, case study participants valued quality written resources, finding such resources facilitate reflective thinking and were often more accessible and appropriate than planned professional development opportunities. Nearly two-thirds of the participants indicated that they accessed at least one form of professional resource to extend and sustain their pedagogical knowledge, an approach strongly recommended in the literature (Committee for the Review of Teaching and Teacher Education, 2003a; Department of Education and Training, 2003b). While advice from professional peers and the practice of teaching extends teachers' practical knowledge, accessing professional resources provides teachers with a theoretical grounding on which to understand the rationale behind specific pedagogy and proposed educational change. As case study participants

indicated, strong pedagogical knowledge allowed them to substantiate teaching practices and strengthened their self-efficacy and perseverance during critical teaching incidents. The availability and use of quality professional resources therefore contributed to early childhood teachers' sustainment in teaching

Line Manager Support

School administrators, or line managers, also impacted on sustainment of effective teaching practice and implementation of educational change. Both first phase participants and case study participants indicated that actions of line manager, such as encouraging attendance at professional development sessions extended their professional learning and teaching competencies. Case study participants revealed that at particular stages in their careers, select line managers had influenced their teaching practice. In these instances, line managers had demonstrated empathy for early childhood education, provided guidance and encouragement and facilitated their access to professional development sessions. What is interesting, however, is that participants did not identify line managers as being instrumental in their coping with the daily demands of their work.

While the reviewed literature advocates that administrative support enhances teacher empowerment and engagement (Darling-Hammond, 2003; Davis & Wilson, 2000; Edwards et al., 2002; Rhodes et al., 2004), less emphasis is placed on line-managers' influence on the daily functioning of teachers' classrooms. This study concurs with the literature, identifying that line manager support appears to have greater impact on early childhood teachers' sustainment in the profession and coping with educational change than on their sustainment of daily teaching in the classroom. As many early childhood teachers have limited contact with line managers on a daily basis, it is feasible that line managers have limited influence on early childhood teachers' sustainment in daily teaching, a finding evident in this study.

Parental Support

This study also found that parents have the capacity to contribute to teachers' enjoyment of their working day. However, parents appear to play little part in

sustaining teachers' effective teaching practice or coping with the implementation of educational change. This study identified parents as a source of support, especially when communication channels were open, providing verbal praise and information on student-related issues. Parents were also able to contribute to the learning processes within the classroom. Though not all of this study's experienced early childhood teachers involved parents in their teaching program, they did reveal that healthy parent-teacher relationships proved rewarding and supportive, contributing to their sustainment in the classroom.

Working in an environment where contact with parents occurs on a daily basis allows early childhood teachers to develop friendships and positive relationships with parents and contributes to their ability to their sustainment in the classroom. Rapport between parents and early childhood teachers also fosters a shared understanding of student needs and realistic expectations, further facilitating early childhood teachers' ability to sustain effective teaching practice in the classroom. While this study did not identify parental support as being critical to participants' sustainment in teaching, parents were found to enhance participants' ability to derive job satisfaction from their daily teaching.

Familial and Social Support

This investigation found that social and familial support influenced participants' continuance in teaching. The support of spouse, family or friends provided participants with a means of coping with the daily demands of their work. In addition, participants revealed how their spouse or family background acted as a source of emotional support, contributing to their ability to persevere in their chosen profession, through critical teaching incidents and on a daily basis. The literature also indicates that social support is beneficial in teachers coping with work-related stress (Gold & Roth, 1993; Howard & Johnson, 2004). Having a significant person to share concerns with, or a family and social life removed from their professional life allowed teachers to keep work-related issues in perspective. Furthermore, having a "life outside of teaching" (S15, F3) contributed to participants' emotional stability and facilitated their maintaining a life-work balance.

Often working in isolation from professional peers, the early childhood teachers involved in this study revealed that to maintain their productive engagement in the classroom, they needed to rely on others for support and assistance. The form this support took varied in accordance with each teacher's background and experiences, but a significant finding of this study was that early childhood teachers sought support from a range of human and physical sources to sustain their effective teaching practice in the classroom.

Early Childhood Teachers' Attitudes and Dispositions

Early childhood teachers involved in this study also alluded to their attitudes and dispositions as contributing to their sustainment of teaching. Positive attitudes and willingness to "have a go" enabled participants in this study to cope both on a daily basis and with the implementation of educational change. Intrinsic motivation, perseverance and self-awareness, as well as having empathy for young children and possessing a sense of humour were some of the character traits commented on by participants in this study, indicating that their dispositions and emotional intelligences influenced their sustainment in the classroom.

Maintaining a positive attitude and utilizing intrinsic motivation empowered nearly half of early childhood teachers in this study to become proactive, seek information and engage in acts of collaboration. Through focussing on the benefits of change, participants remained positive and were able to cope with demands associated with the implementation of educational change. As one case study participant, Mel, stated "trust the system, that there is actually a value here in what you're doing" (Mel, Interview #4, 27/9/04, p. 68). Intrinsic motivation also led participants to seek information on different teaching practices, to enhance their pedagogical beliefs and effective delivery of education in the classroom. Furthermore, participants' willingness to be flexible, contributed to their ability to modify and adapt teaching practices to cope with change on a daily basis.

Over a third of the participants involved in both phases of this study revealed that their self-awareness contributed to developing realistic expectations of themselves and what they were capable of achieving in a working day. In focussing on meeting their personal needs and needs of the students, as well as being aware of

their own limitations, these early childhood teachers were able to be circumspect, rationalising and prioritising their workload. Self-awareness also enhanced participants' self-efficacy, furthering their sustainment in teaching. The literature identifies that self-efficacy empowers people with the confidence to persevere, be resilient and increases the likelihood of achieving success (Bandura, 1997), a finding also evident in this investigation. The early childhood teachers in this study indicated that self-efficacy contributed to their confidence, flexibility and perseverance in dealing with daily disruptions, student behaviour and unforeseen changes to their timetable or class activities. Consequently, participants found they were able to cope with their teaching duties and be sustained in the classroom.

Many of the participants' comments in the interviews and surveys related to competencies associated with a strong emotional intelligence: self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy and social skills (Goleman, 1998, p. 26). Emotional intelligence, "the capacity for recognizing our own feelings and those of others, for motivating ourselves, and for managing emotions well in ourselves, and in our relationships" (Goleman, 1998, p. 317) has been linked to effective teaching practice and the successful implementation of educational change (Day, 1999a; Goleman, 1998; Hargreaves et al., 2001). In this study, however, early childhood teachers' emotional intelligence appears to be linked to their sustainment in teaching. Emotional intelligence influences participants' abilities to competently manage work-related commitments. Through knowing themselves and what goals they aspire to achieve, as well as taking into consideration the needs of others as well as their own these teachers were sustained in their daily teaching.

Participants also revealed that specific character traits or strengths attributed to their dispositions and character (Peterson & Seligman, 2004) influenced their sustainment in teaching. In particular, over a third of the first phase participants indicated a sense of humour was a significant factor of sustainment. Enjoyment of opportunities involving shared laughter with students and education assistants relieved stressful situations and fostered a harmonious work environment. Having empathy for young children and possessing a sense of humour also enabled participants to place daily stresses into perspective. These character traits enabled participants to sustain job satisfaction in their teaching practice, a finding also

evident in the literature (Lokan, 2003; Williams, 2003b). Furthermore, participants also spoke about personal character traits they found enhanced their sustainment in the classroom, including perseverance, patience, tolerance and being calm. As one case study participant, Gwen stated:

> "I'm like a duck on the water, calm on top but paddling like heck underneath. I try to be calm, because there's no point stressing with the kids. You don't want them to be stressed. (Gwen, Interview#4, 21/6/04, p. 52).

Case study participants disclosed that although these character traits may have arisen from their family background or early life experiences, such traits enabled them to adapt to their teaching environment and cope with the daily demands of their work. Traditionally, effective early childhood teachers have been described as caring and nurturing, exhibiting tolerance and patience in their daily practice (Hare, 1993; McClean, 1991; Ryan & Cooper, 2000). Whether teachers are drawn to the early childhood profession because they already have these character traits, or develop them as a result of their teaching experiences is a debatable topic. However, what is evident in this study is that the character traits forming participants' dispositions appear to contribute to their coping with the demands of their work and being sustained in their teaching.

In this study, early childhood teachers indicated that how they react to particular incidences, to educational change and the daily demands of their work is determined by their human nature, or character: their attitudes, beliefs, dispositions and emotions.

Early Childhood Teachers' Health and Well-being

Health and well-being were also identified as factors contributing to participants' sustainment in the classroom. As nearly half of the early childhood teachers involved in this study had taught 20 years or more (see Appendix G) many were approaching a stage in their lives when health issues were beginning to take precedence. Participants indicated that their personal health and well-being had to be taken into consideration if they were to maintain a life-work balance and continue teaching in the classroom.

Participants reported they were aware of their need for adequate rest and exercise, combined with a balanced diet, to ensure their physical well-being and ability to cope on a daily basis, strategies all recommended in the literature (Holmes, 2005; Ryel et al., 2002). Participants also related how personal health issues led them to take necessary breaks from work and make appropriate adjustments to their daily teaching practice to ensure their continuance in teaching. Emotional health and well-being also impacted on these teachers' coping with the demands of their work. In particular, two case study participants, Rachel and Grace, disclosed how the recent death of a person close to them gave rise to self-reflection, leading to their redefining professional beliefs and re-affirming their commitment and continuance in teaching.

Ageing trends within the profession (Committee for the Review of Teaching and Teacher Education, 2003a; Danielson, 2002; Department of Education and Training, 2002a) indicate that teachers' health and well-being will become a growing concern in the near future. Indeed, the literature discloses that many teachers find it difficult to maintain a life-work balance or personal well-being (Dunlop & Macdonald, 2004; Holmes, 2005; Institute for the Service Professions, 2005). Given the limited research in this area, this study's findings are significant. For the early childhood teachers in this study, awareness of their own well-being, accompanied by their willingness to adapt and modify teaching practices to accommodate personal issues contribute to their sustainment in teaching.

Early Childhood Teachers' Pedagogical Practice

This study also found that the way in which early childhood teachers implement their teaching program enhanced their ability to cope with the demands of their work. In particular, participants identified flexibility of practice and time-management strategies as promoting their sustainment in teaching. Furthermore, all of the case study participants and 16 first phase participants indicated that organizational strategies, including the use of routines and streamlined planning facilitated their ability to cope on a daily basis. Rationalizing and prioritising were also strategies employed by nearly a third of the participants to cope with the implementation of educational change. In addition, reflective thinking contributed to case study participants sustaining effective delivery of quality education to students.

Although the literature identifies teachers' pedagogical knowledge as a key contributor to effective teaching practice (Committee for the Review of Teaching and Teacher Education, 2003a; Riner, 2000; Ryan & Cooper, 2000), it does not disclose how implementation of such knowledge contributes to teachers' sustainment. This study indicates that, regardless of the particular educational philosophical beliefs adopted by experienced early childhood teachers, it is their strength of belief and ability to apply such knowledge to their classroom teaching that sustains these teachers on a daily basis. Participants' tacit knowledge, a form of "knowing how" (Sternberg, 2001, p. 230) contributed to their sustainment in teaching. As an example, case study participants' willingness to be flexible enabled them to modify practices to meet students' interests and needs, as well as their own personal capabilities. Furthermore, participants' prioritizing and accommodating changes in stages over an extended period of time, allowed nearly a third of the participants to cope with the implementation of educational change.

Strength of belief, flexibility and autonomy of practice, have previously been discussed as promoting participants' sustainment in the profession. These factors also contribute to case study participants' sustainment in teaching. Many early childhood teachers have learnt to be independent in their practice through working in an environment removed from continuous contact with and support from other educators. Consequently, early childhood teachers have come to value having a strong pedagogical knowledge, being prepared in advance and having routines in place. Such practices provide teachers with the confidence to deal with unforeseen circumstances and be flexible in their daily teaching practice. A finding of this study is that the nature of early childhood teaching, autonomous and flexible, may well enhance teachers' sustainment in teaching.

In addition, case study participants referred to reflective practice as facilitating their coping with the demands of their work. Engaging in reflective thinking enabled these teachers to identify personal and student needs, develop realistic expectations and modify their pedagogical practices to ensure their working day ran smoothly and they maintained a life-work balance. Reflective thinking, a strategy recommended in the literature (Day, 1999a; Loughran, 1996; Moore, 2001; Schon, 1987) also contributed to participants' rationalization of professional

knowledge and proposed educational changes, allowing these teachers to strengthen their understanding of early childhood pedagogical beliefs, reinforce their commitment to the profession and be sustained in their teaching.

This study found that early childhood teachers' practical application of pedagogical knowledge teaching practices, their tacit knowledge, contributed to their sustainment in teaching. Participants' willingness to engage in reflective thinking, to be organised, flexible, and modify and streamline their teaching practice, contributed to their ability to adapt and cope with the demands of their work and the ongoing implementation of change.

Additional Sustaining Factors

In this investigation, several participants also referred to other, less common, factors contributing to their sustainment in the classroom, including early childhood teachers' conditions of employment, resources and the experience of teaching. Once again, regardless of the low incidence of nomination of these factors in this study, such factors may be significant to the sustainment of other early childhood teachers in teaching.

Conditions of Employment

For ten early childhood teachers involved in this research, their conditions of employment, particularly the work hours, leave entitlements and school holidays, contributed to their daily continuance in teaching. As indicated by the case study participants, school holidays and leave entitlements enabled them to take a break from the ongoing demands of their work and to pursue other interests, including travel and further study. Regular breaks also facilitated several participants organizing their preparation time and teaching responsibilities into manageable workloads. These findings appear to contrast with the literature where teachers' workload and conditions of employment are found to lead to teacher job dissatisfaction, stress and attrition (Lock, 1993; Louden, 1987; Vandenberghe & Huberman, 1999). In this study this was not evident. These participants indicated that their conditions of employment were conducive to family life, facilitating their balancing life-work commitments and coping with the demands of their work.

Appropriate Resources

In this study, four of the case study participants also revealed that the availability and use of appropriate resources contributed to their sustainment in teaching. These teachers disclosed that their adherence to preferred pedagogical approaches relied on their accessing a range of readily available, appropriate resources. Without suitable resources these teachers indicated they could not implement what they considered to be effective learning programs for their students. Consequently, lack of appropriate resources would impact on their job satisfaction and feelings of professional competency and integrity. For these teachers, appropriate resources were considered necessary to sustaining effective teaching practice in the classroom.

The Experience of Teaching

Ten participants in this investigation also disclosed that the experience of teaching led to their developing effective teaching practice and sustaining a long-term commitment to early childhood education. While pre-service training, professional reading and further studies extended participants' theoretical knowledge of educational philosophies and approaches, the experience of teaching reinforced their understanding of child development and pedagogical practices.

Furthermore, through observing and working closely with students over an extended period of time case study participants revealed that their theoretical knowledge of effective teaching strategies became embedded in daily practices to become part of their practical knowledge (Elbaz, 1983). These teachers also indicated that the experience of teaching contributed to their developing tacit knowledge (Sternberg, 2001). Practical and tacit knowledge enhanced participants' capacity to be flexible in their daily practice, knowing how to modify and adapt teaching strategies to meet student needs and cope with the changing demands of their work.

Learning through experience has long been considered a key contributor to teachers' knowledge (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995; Day, 1999a; Elbaz, 1983; Sternberg, 2001), a finding also evident in this study. However, what has also been noted in this study is that the experience of teaching also appears to contribute to

teachers' coping mechanisms and ability to be sustained in teaching. Given that there appears to be little research linking the experience of teaching and teacher knowledge to teacher sustainment this is an area that may warrant further investigation.

Summary of Early Childhood Teachers' Sustainment in Teaching

This study found that many of the factors that impact on early childhood teachers' sustainment in the profession also determine their sustainment in teaching. In particular, the participants in this study indicated that the relationships they developed with work colleagues were critical to their coping with educational change and the demands of their work. An interest in students led participants to extend their pedagogy and sustain effective teaching practices. Furthermore, participants relied on support from a range of sources, including professional resources, line managers, parents, family and friends to ensure their continuance in teaching.

In this investigation, early childhood teachers' attitudes and dispositions, as well as their health and well-being also influenced their ability to cope with the demands of their work. Traits associated with a competent emotional intelligence facilitated participants being able to rationalise and modify their teaching practice in order to maintain a life-work balance. Participants also indicated that their tacit knowledge and daily teaching practices further enhanced their continuance in teaching. To a lesser extent, early childhood teaching's conditions of employment, the availability of appropriate resources and the experience of teaching also contributed to participants' sustainment in teaching. For the participants in this study their ability to cope with educational change and the demands of their work while sustaining effective teaching practice in the classroom relied on self-awareness, enjoyment of their teaching role and the ability to manage life and work commitments.

Summary of Key Findings

Teaching is a complex profession and sustainment in such a profession requires ongoing commitment and effort. The findings of this study are significant in that they provide an insight into the nature of early childhood teachers' work and

their sustainment in the profession and in teaching. Furthermore, in identifying positive factors that contribute to participants' sustainment this study promotes the perception that early childhood teaching is a rewarding and sustaining profession.

This investigation revealed that many early childhood teachers are sustained and committed to their profession, continuing to provide quality educational services to their students. While unrealistic expectations are perceived to contribute to teacher attrition (Danielson, 2002; Darling-Hammond, 2003; Inman & Marlow, 2004) in this study early childhood teachers revealed that realistic expectations contributed to their sustainment in the profession. Through identifying what was important to their lives, the participants of this study were able to prioritize and balance commitments and maintain their personal well-being, job satisfaction and life-work balance.

The data from this study disclosed that early childhood teachers were sustained in their profession and continue teaching in classrooms due to several key factors that have influenced their personal and professional lives. In particular, participants in this study indicated that the factors that contributed to their enjoyment of teaching, their job satisfaction, also sustained professional commitment, occupational motivation and ability to cope with the demands of their work. Empathy for young children and enjoyment of daily interaction with students, accompanied by observation of students' growth and development were key factors contributing to participants' professional sustainment. Potentially unique to this study, participants were able to describe the specific traits that made their work with students both enjoyable and rewarding. Furthermore, the desire to meet student needs also empowered participants in this study to extend their pedagogical understandings and sustain effective teaching practice in the classroom.

This study also demonstrated how the unique nature of early childhood settings, working with young students and another adult present, is conducive to teacher sustainment. The relationships participants developed with work colleagues and professional peers proved both supportive and empowering, sustaining participants' professional commitment and engagement in the profession. Work-based relationships also extended participants' professional learning, pedagogical

practice and ability to cope on a daily basis and with the implementation of educational change. In addition, the work conditions associated with early childhood teaching supported participants' continuance in teaching. In contrast to the literature (Darling-Hammond, 2003; Lock, 1993; Louden, 1987), this study found that participants' work conditions, including income, work hours, holidays and leave entitlements were beneficial to meeting personal commitments and maintaining a life-work balance. Furthermore, working in a climate that promoted a sense of autonomy and propensity for flexibility, variety and change made participating early childhood teachers' work stimulating, empowering and sustaining.

In investigating the nature of sustainment this study found that many of the traits attributed to teachers' emotional intelligence promoted participants' sustainment in the profession and in teaching. Positive and altruistic beliefs, strong pedagogical understandings, intrinsic motivation and self-awareness enhanced participants' self-efficacy and contributed to their developing realistic expectations. Such factors enabled participating early childhood teachers to rationalize and prioritize commitments and make adjustments to their teaching practice so that they could maintain their personal well-being, meet student needs and balance commitments. This study also found that the dispositions and character traits of participants in this study further promoted their ongoing sustainment. Traits such as perseverance, possessing a sense of humour, patience and having empathy for students enhanced participants' working day and reinforced their ability to cope with stress-related factors. In this study, the nurturing and caring nature of early childhood teachers appeared to contribute to their sustainment in teaching.

Furthermore, this study provided evidence that support is significant to teacher sustainment. Working in a socially-orientated profession, the participants of this study indicated that they actively sought support from a range of sources to further their sustainment in the profession and strengthen their ability to cope with educational change and the demands of their work. Identified in the literature as enhancing occupational motivation and the implementation of educational change (Committee for the Review of Teaching and Teacher Education, 2003a; Day, 1997; Hargreaves et al., 2001), this study found that engaging in acts of collaboration and mentorship with professional peers strengthened teacher sustainment and

engagement in the profession. Participants in this study also valued accessing professional resources, including educational literature, professional associations and professional development sessions, as well as receiving support from parents, line managers and family and friends. Acknowledging the need for support and accessing support was crucial to the participants in this study being sustained in the profession and in teaching.

Early childhood teachers in this study also demonstrated that their practical and tacit knowledge facilitated their sustainment in teaching. Participants described practices they utilized to sustain their teaching effectiveness, including use of time management and organizational strategies, as well as flexibility of practice and reflective thinking. Case study participants also described how adherence to preferred pedagogical practices and the availability of appropriate resources strengthened their self-efficacy and implementation of preferred philosophical approaches. Further to this, case study participants also revealed how the experience of teaching contributed to their understanding of pedagogical practices, commitment to early childhood education and sustainment in teaching.

This study provided a descriptive insight into key factors that sustain many early childhood teachers in their profession and in teaching. Addressing a lack of research into early childhood teachers' work and teacher sustainment this study revealed that both common and unique factors contribute to early childhood teachers' sustainment. Early childhood teachers' attitudes and beliefs, pedagogical knowledge and practices promoted their sustainment, as did their seeking of support from various sources, particularly from within the profession. The early childhood setting and associated work conditions also proved supportive for participants allowing them to sustain job satisfaction, personal well-being and balance life-work commitments. The findings of this investigation indicate that for the participants in this study early childhood teaching is both a rewarding and sustaining profession.

CHAPTER EIGHT: CONCLUSION

Educational change is an ongoing feature of the teaching profession. Those who work within the profession are required to respond to shifting societal expectations and educational reforms to ensure the continued provision of quality educational service to students. In order to not only survive, but thrive in their profession and in the classroom, teachers must be able to respond to and adapt to change, meeting the demands of their work while remaining productively engaged in the teaching process. This study examined the realities of those working within the teaching profession, identifying and describing factors that contribute to early childhood teachers' sustainment in the profession and teaching in the classroom.

The findings of this investigation make a contribution to knowledge relating to teacher sustainment as research in this area is minimal. Furthermore, previous studies have not specifically focussed on early childhood teachers' sustainment in the profession, or in the classroom. Providing an insight into the nature of early childhood teachers' work and sustainment, this study identified key factors that sustain participating early childhood teachers' productive engagement and continuation in teaching. In particular, the case study participants, all experienced early childhood teachers, gave rich descriptions of beliefs and teaching practices contributing to their sustainment. Participants in this study revealed that for them early childhood teaching is both a demanding and rewarding profession, where their sustainment relies on their ability to enjoy what they are doing while meeting commitments and maintaining a life-work balance. This study identified that early childhood teachers' attitudes, beliefs and dispositions, personal health and well-being, access to support, pedagogical knowledge and practice and the nature of the profession in which they work were key factors determining participants' sustainment in the profession and in teaching.

The Nature of Teacher Sustainment

In this investigation, teacher sustainment was considered to be the propensity of teachers to remain effectively engaged in the teaching process and profession over an extended period of time. Compared to other studies, which used the terms "resiliency" and "perseverance," inferring survival or endurance (Howard & Johnson, 2004; Milner, 2002; Patterson et al., 2004; Stanford, 2001), this

investigation sought to identify what makes a teacher continue to be engaged in the profession and to maintain effective teaching practice in the classroom.

Many of the early childhood teachers in this study, however, held a different perception of teacher sustainment. For these participants, in particular the case study participants, teacher sustainment was about finding satisfaction in their daily practice and having a strong belief in what they were doing. The participants demonstrated a strong commitment to the profession. At the same time participants indicated that sustainment is also about having a life-work balance, meeting personal and professional responsibilities while maintaining personal integrity, health and wellbeing.

This study found that participants' enjoyment of their teaching role and belief in early childhood education were key components of their sustainment. Deriving pleasure from the work they do and those they came in contact with on a daily basis engendered emotional wellbeing, a sense of fulfilment and loyalty to the profession. In this study, factors sustaining participants' job satisfaction also sustained their occupational motivation, professional commitment and coping mechanisms, reinforcing participants' educational beliefs and engagement in the profession. Case study participants also revealed that a strong grounding in child development and early childhood pedagogy, developed early in their careers strengthened their self-efficacies and sustained their effective teaching practice. Even though participants disclosed that their active engagement in the profession fluctuated during the course of their professional lives, their commitment to the profession and belief in the value of early childhood education did not.

Furthermore, for many of the early childhood teachers in this study the expectation of sustaining a high level of productive engagement in the profession and teaching process over an extended period of time was unrealistic. Participants in this study indicated that a range of responsibilities, both personal and professional impinged on their time. To meet their commitments while maintaining personal well-being participants found they had to be realistic and make adjustments in their professional lives. Consequently, participants' level of professional engagement fluctuated during their teaching careers, a finding in contrast to past research

(Huberman, 1993; Katz, 1972), where teachers' commitment and engagement was considered to either decline or increase with years of teaching experience.

Given that the early childhood teachers in this study, the vast majority being female, have commitments outside of teaching, these other interests sometimes have to take precedence over teaching. Personal, familial and health-related issues all impinge on teachers' limited time and capacity to actively engage in professional roles, both in and outside of the classroom. In this study, the ability to maintain a life-work balance contributed to participants' satisfaction with their chosen occupation and the associated conditions of employment. Maintaining a life-work balance also enhanced participants' emotional well-being, furthering their ability to cope with stress-related factors, including the implementation of educational change. In maintaining a life-work balance the participants of this study indicated that they avoided instances of disillusionment, job dissatisfaction, teacher stress and burnout. This study found that maintaining a life-work balance is critical not only to teachers' sustainment in the profession, but also to maintaining personal well-being and quality of life.

If, as this study's findings indicate, teacher sustainment is about maintaining job satisfaction, commitment to the profession and a life-work balance, then several questions arise. Are people entering the teaching profession with realistic expectations about the demands of their work and their own abilities to balance commitments? Are teachers competent at identifying and acting on those factors that promote job satisfaction and sustainment in their chosen occupation? Are teachers adequately trained, and in-serviced, to ensure their pedagogical knowledge strengthens their self-efficacy? And, of particular concern, as highlighted by recent research (Institute for the Service Professions, 2005), are the roles, responsibilities and conditions associated with teaching conducive to maintaining personal well-being and a life-work balance?

Clearly these questions cannot be answered without further examination. What is apparent from this study's findings is that the nature of teacher sustainment is complex, meriting continued investigation.

Teacher Character and Teacher Wisdom

From this study emerged the notion that sustainment in teaching appears to be related to teacher character, in particular teacher wisdom. Many of the sustaining factors nominated by participants in this study were based either on their attitudes, beliefs, dispositions, intelligences or knowledge, all of which could be encompassed under the overarching concept of teacher character. In this study, teacher character may be considered as the culmination of humanistic traits, aptitudes or character strengths (Peterson & Seligman, 2004) that contribute to teachers' sustaining effective engagement in the profession and teaching process.

In revisiting the literature this study found that the educational research is yet to investigate the notions of teacher character and teacher wisdom. However, in examining the related disciplines of philosophy and psychology, a wealth of information exists regarding the nature of human character, virtues and wisdom. Drawing on a select group of references to describe the potential links between teacher character, teacher wisdom and teacher sustainment (Colarusso, 1994; De Bono, 1996; Peterson & Seligman, 2004; Sternberg, 2001, 2006), this study acknowledges that this is an area that requires further research and discussion before any substantive claims can be made.

In recent years, psychological research has focussed on investigating human character in an effort to address a perceived decline of values within society. Based on the positive premise that people have redeeming qualities that enable them to lead the "good life" (Peterson & Seligman, 2004, p. 4), psychological research has attempted to describe those traits, or character strengths that enhance a person's virtuous behaviour and ability to lead a good life. Peterson and Seligman (2004, p. 29-30) have identified 24 character strengths and six associated core virtues that contribute to forming a person's nature or character.

While this study does not intend to provide an in-depth description of each character trait, an examination of the findings pertaining to this study indicates that the participants in this study possess many of the traits identified by Peterson and Seligman (2004). Character strengths appear to influence participants' approach to teaching and ability to be sustained in the profession and in teaching. For example,

nearly three-quarters of the participants in this study indicated that the character strengths of love and kindness, reflected in their empathy for students and altruistic belief of making a difference to students' lives, enhanced their sustainment of job satisfaction. Love of learning, curiosity, vitality and social intelligence also led two-thirds of the participants in this study to extend their professional learning and engagement in the profession, as well as cope with the implementation of educational change. Furthermore, the character strength of social responsibility, contributed to over three-quarters of the participants seeking support from within the profession, to collaborate and operate as part of a team furthering their sustainment in teaching. Persistence, vitality and integrity were also traits demonstrated by nearly a third of the participants, contributing to their emotional resiliency and self-efficacy, promoting their sustainment during critical teaching incidences and the implementation of educational change. In addition, self-regulation and prudence facilitated participants' balancing commitments and coping with the daily demands of their teaching, while a sense of humour, optimism and a sense of purpose sustained participants' job satisfaction, occupational motivation and commitment to their chosen profession.

Furthermore, the case study participants in this investigation, all credited as experienced and competent teachers, demonstrated that the character trait of perspective was a key contributor to their sustainment. Perspective, the ability to know how to balance intrapersonal, interpersonal and extra-personal needs (Sternberg, 2001, p. 231) while making "meaningful use of cognitive skills" (Sternberg, 2006, p. 518) was evident in participants' awareness of their need to adjust their pedagogical practices and engagement in the profession to maintain a life-work balance. Possessing strong pedagogical knowledge and beliefs about teaching, as well as a depth of perception of student and personal needs, case study participants rationalised their teaching practice, making wise judgements about appropriate practice, their own capabilities and the value of proposed educational changes. Perspective, also known as wisdom (De Bono, 1996; Peterson & Seligman, 2004; Sternberg, 2001, 2006), facilitated case study participants balancing personal and professional commitments, while sustaining their personal well-being and effective engagement in the profession.

Moreover, these experienced teachers were intrinsically motivated to extend their learning, displaying openness to new ideas and love of learning. All enjoyed daily interaction with students, deliberately manipulating their daily practice to minimize potential stresses and sustain job satisfaction, indicative of a depth of awareness and perception, traits associated with wisdom (De Bono, 1996). At the same time, these teachers realised they were not indispensable and reduced their engagement in the profession to accommodate personal needs, once again demonstrating self-awareness and perspective of their place in society. The case study participants revealed that their "mature understanding of life" (Colarusso, 1994, p. 261) contributed to their flexibility of teaching practice, accommodating a range of issues while maintaining their life-work balance. For the experienced early childhood teachers in this study their teacher wisdom appears to be a key determinant of their sustainment in teaching and in the profession.

While differing definitions of wisdom exist, in this study teacher wisdom is considered to be a teacher's ability to take into consideration and act on a range of forces impacting on their personal and professional lives so that they can maintain emotional and physical wellbeing, a life-work balance and be sustained in the profession and in teaching.

Although this study's sample size was small, and the conceptual framework underpinning this investigation discouraged generalizations, it is plausible that teacher character and wisdom are the keys to teacher sustainment. As outlined above, the participants in this study nominated many factors that could be attributed to character strengths, particularly those associated to the virtue of wisdom. This gives rise to the possibility that teacher wisdom, and its associated character strengths, is fundamental to the character of the sustained teacher. However, without further research no definitive conclusions or generalizations can be made.

At present, teacher wisdom and teacher character are not the focus of attention for educational research. In the past, studies have tended to examine singular and often negative, aspects of teacher knowledge and practice, in preference to considering the "wholeness," or character of teachers. Even this study, which took a positive approach to investigating teachers, examined specific traits of

sustainment, such as job satisfaction, occupational motivation, professional commitment and effective practice, rather than adopting a holistic view that sustainment is about maintaining a life-work balance. In adopting a positive and holistic perspective to examining phenomena such as teacher character, teacher wisdom and teacher sustainment, educational research may yield significant findings, contributing to the well-being of the profession.

Further examination of teachers' character strengths, in particular those relating to teacher wisdom, may reveal how these traits develop and impact on teachers' sustainment in the classroom and the profession. Findings may also disclose how teachers' character strengths can be enhanced, further contributing to teacher sustainment. Research may also identify ways the teaching profession can screen prospective candidates for pre-service training to ensure they have the appropriate aptitude to make a positive contribution to education and be sustained in the profession.

Support for Sustainment

This investigation also revealed that support is critical to teacher sustainment, both in the profession and in the classroom. Support provides teachers with a source of clarification and affirmation of their teaching beliefs and practices, enhancing their self-efficacy and ability to cope on a daily basis. Support also strengthens perseverance, a trait associated with teachers' emotional intelligence (Goleman, 1995, 1998) and also considered to be a character strength (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). In accessing support, teachers are able to persevere, knowing that their teaching efforts are valued and make a worthwhile contribution to enhancing student learning.

Although most early childhood teachers work in relative isolation from their professional peers, the desire to be with like-minded educators, led participants in this study to actively seek contact and support from within the profession. Dialogue, collaboration and sharing of teaching duties with work colleagues and professional peers were essential to participants sustaining effective teaching practice, engagement in the profession and coping with the daily demands of their work. Collegial support also proved beneficial during critical teaching incidences and the

implementation of educational change. Just as professional support is considered essential to the effective implementation of educational change (Hargreaves, 1997; Hargreaves et al., 2001), this study found that professional support is essential to teacher sustainment.

Other sources of support, including professional development, written educational resources, school administrators and parents were also valued to varying degrees. Participants relied on these sources, according to each teacher's particular circumstances, the accessibility of such resources and the regard in which the sources, or persons, were held. In particular, the experienced early childhood teachers in this study revealed they relied on the assistance and cooperation of a range of persons to ensure they sustained a life-work balance and quality of life.

In this study, employer and organizational support played little part in teachers' sustainment. Line manager and school administrators also appeared to provide minimal support to sustaining participants' effective teaching practice or coping on a daily basis. With reported incidences of job dissatisfaction, disillusionment, stress and burnout on the rise (Rhodes et al., 2004; Scott, Cox et al., 1999; Vandenberghe & Huberman, 1999) this finding is a concern, indicating that those in positions of authority appear to have little positive influence on teachers' sustainment. A closer examination of the role organizational and administrative support plays in teacher sustainment appears to be justified

If, as this study indicates, support is critical to teacher sustainment, then several questions arise. How does the availability and access to support affect other sectors of the teaching profession? Are early childhood teachers sustained because they have greater access to support, in the form of an education assistant, than other sectors of the profession? Likewise, is their daily contact with parents more supportive than in other sectors of the profession? Are organizations and line managers providing adequate and appropriate support to ensure teachers maintain effective teaching practice and cope on a daily basis? Also, is the teaching profession being supported within society and being promoted as a worthwhile profession? These questions cannot be answered without further investigation.

Clearly the role of support in teacher sustainment is an area that merits closer scrutiny and attention.

Career Path Enhancement

This study revealed that teachers' career paths are dynamic and do not progress along smooth linear paths. Neither does teachers' level of active engagement in the profession or commitment to the profession remain fixed or stable. This study's findings indicate that job satisfaction, occupational motivation, teaching effectiveness, professional and active engagement in the profession are all influenced by a range of factors impacting on teachers' abilities to maintain a life-work balance and personal well-being. Likewise, the career paths of teachers are also determined by a range of factors, many of which contribute to enhancing teachers' professional lives.

Case study participants in this study, all experienced early childhood teachers, outlined their individual career paths, describing critical teaching incidents, and how their own pedagogical beliefs, knowledge and practices developed over the course of their careers. These teachers indicated that their teacher character and wisdom, health and well-being, pedagogical beliefs and practice, support and enjoyment of their teaching role influenced their sustainment in the profession and in teaching. Such factors contributed to their ability to be flexible in their teaching practice, to seek variety and new challenges, sustaining their occupational motivation and enhancing their professional lives.

As mentioned in the discussion chapter, the findings of this study appear to contrast with Huberman's (1993) professional life cycle stages and Katz's (1972) model of preschool teachers' development, but concur with Steffy and Wolfe's (2001) model of professional development for teachers. In this investigation case study participants indicated that their practical pedagogical knowledge (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995) and tacit knowledge (Sternberg, 2001) continued to develop over the course of their professional lives, as did their belief in the value of early childhood education. However, these teachers also disclosed that their capacity to devote time to professionally-orientated activities and be actively engaged in the profession, particularly in out-of-school hours fluctuated, depending on their ability

to meet a range of responsibilities. For these teachers professional commitment is about mental commitment, rather than physical participation and this underlined their continuance in teaching.

The findings of this study indicate that regardless of what stage teachers are at in their professional lives, their active engagement in the profession and effective teaching practice can be enhanced, particularly when teachers are able to sustain personal well-being and a life-work balance. As indicated by the case study participants, professional support, through collaboration and mentorship, extended their teaching practice and engagement in the profession, sustaining their occupational motivation and strengthening their profession commitment. The indirect actions of line managers also led these teachers to engage in professional reading and attend professional development sessions, further enhancing their teaching performance. Given the encouragement and opportunities to extend their professional learning, these teachers were empowered in their teaching roles and, where possible, extended their engagement in the profession.

With the teaching profession experiencing an ageing trend and increasing incidences of novice teacher attrition (Danielson, 2002; Department of Education and Training, 2002a; Johnson et al., 2005), education systems are beginning to realise the importance of retaining quality teachers in the profession. This study identifies that some of the strategies early childhood teachers have adopted over the course of their careers to ensure they sustain effective teaching practice, have also contributed to enhancing their career paths. As this investigation is limited, involving a small sample of participants, further research is recommended in developing strategies and practices to enhance teachers' career paths so that they are sustainment both in the profession and in teaching.

The Early Childhood Setting

For the participants in this study, early childhood teaching is a sustaining profession, suited to their lifestyles and belief systems. The early childhood setting provides these teachers with extrinsic rewards, such as an income, convenient work hours, school holidays and internationally-recognized qualifications, as well as

intrinsic rewards, including job satisfaction and altruistic benefits of contributing to society and making a difference to students' lives.

Furthermore, the experienced early childhood teachers in this study revealed that a degree of autonomy in their workplace empowers them to make their own decisions regarding appropriate pedagogical practice and the implementation of educational change, contributing to their self-efficacy, flexibility of practice and sustainment in the teaching process.

The early childhood teachers in this study, being predominantly female, also confirm the perception that early childhood education is a rewarding profession, suited to their feminine predispositions: their interest in children, their caring and nurturing natures and their social conscience. Social contact and support from work colleagues was highly valued by participants in this study. Likewise, autonomy of practice and limited direction from administrators, who until recent years have been predominantly male, was also valued. In this study it appears that feministic traits are significant to teachers' sustainment in early childhood education.

Early childhood education is a feminised profession. Although this study did not adopt a feminist perspective, the study's findings indicate that the feminisation of the early childhood teaching profession impacts on teachers' sustainment in the profession. In considering this proposition several questions arise: are female teachers more sustained than male teachers; are early childhood teachers more sustained than in other sectors of the profession by working in a predominantly female profession, or, because of the caring and nurturing roles women have adopted in the past, are early childhood teachers more prepared to continue in such roles, being sustained in the process?

While this study did not address these issues, it does highlight that early childhood teaching, the feminisation of teaching and teacher sustainment are areas that merit closer scrutiny and further investigation

Limitations of This Study

Given the size and methods used in this study, the findings are limited and open to interpretation. As only a select number of early childhood teachers participated in this study, and as this investigation is based on a qualitative conceptual framework, the findings may not be generalised to represent all early childhood teachers, or the entire teaching population.

In addition, due to the nature of the chosen methodology, potentially flawed conclusions may have been reached. The use of descriptive open-ended questions allowed participants to provide several responses, with no indication as to the degree of significance of each factor and whether factors were prevalent all the time, or of a transient nature. Although efforts were made to ensure accurate depiction of participants' responses, misinterpretations may have inadvertently arisen. Such is the nature of qualitative interpretivist research.

In acknowledging this study's limitations further research into teacher sustainment is strongly advocated, across all sectors of the teaching profession, to verify, validate and expand on this study's findings. In particular, further investigation is recommended to develop a clear understanding of the term "sustainment" and to identify key factors influencing other sectors of the teaching profession. Research into the career paths of different sectors of the teaching profession is also recommended, as is research into how teacher sustainment impacts on student learning. In this way credible knowledge of teacher sustainment may be constructed, contributing to the ongoing sustainment of all teachers in the profession, their effective engagement in the teaching process and the continuance of quality education for students.

Conclusion

This study has endeavoured to provide an insight into key factors that contribute to early childhood teachers' sustainment in their profession and effective engagement in the teaching process. As little research has focussed specifically on early childhood teachers or teacher sustainment, this study addresses these issues, revealing that early childhood teachers are sustained in their profession through common understandings: their attitudes and beliefs, realistic expectations,

pedagogical knowledge and practice, and sources of support, in particular collegial support. The notions of teacher character and teacher wisdom also arose, as potentially being key determinants of teacher sustainment, pending further investigation.

Also identified are the unique features of the early childhood setting as being conducive to teacher sustainment, including ongoing support, autonomy, flexibility and resources, contributing to early childhood teachers' empowerment and engagement in the teaching process. This study also highlights that early childhood teaching is a rewarding profession, comprised of dedicated teachers who are proactively engaged in the teaching process, striving to sustain delivery of quality education to their students.

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Appendix A

Disclosure Form for Research Study:
"The Sustainability of Early Childhood Teachers in the Classroom."

Dear Colleague,

The purpose of this study is to investigate factors that impact on early childhood teachers' abilities to be sustained in their commitment to the profession and their practice of teaching.

Through investigating how teachers maintain their enthusiasm and commitment to teaching when faced with heavy workloads, and increasing and changing demands, it is hoped to highlight factors that contribute to teaching being perceived as a worthwhile career. This study may disclose information that could lead to reducing incidences of other teachers experiencing disillusionment, stress, burnout or exiting from the teaching profession, and also provide practical coping-strategies for newly graduating teachers.

The collection of data will be initially based on 5 focus group sessions, each involving up to 10 early childhood teachers. Lasting no more that 40 minutes, participants will be asked to recount and discuss key factors that have contributed to their being sustained through these experiences, and in their teaching. These sessions will be audio-taped, then transcribed with any names and locations changed to preserve confidentiality.

Furthermore, this study will include 6 case studies involving experienced early childhood teachers, currently teaching in the classroom. These 6 teachers will participate in 5 taped interviews, of 40 minutes duration, to be arranged at a mutually convenient time and location. Each participant will also be asked to write notes pertaining to their sustainment in teaching.

All information received will remain confidential and anonymous. Names and locations of teachers and students will be removed from any transcripts or products from the study, and substituted with pseudonyms. Participants in the study will have the right to review their transcripts to ensure their credibility and anonymity. As a participant, you will also have the right to withdraw from the study at any time, prior to publication, if you choose to (related documentation will then be destroyed).

This is not a personal appraisal, but an opportunity to share your valued ideas and experiences. Your participation in this study will make a worthwhile contribution to the limited knowledge available in regards to early childhood teachers being sustained in their profession.

Any questions regarding the study, or your involvement, may be directed to the researcher, Pam Kilgallon, phone 9#######, or Dr Carmel Maloney, phone 9####### (Edith Cowan University).

Appendix B
Consent Form for School Principals

School Principal's Agreement to Approach Teachers to Participate in the Study-
"The Sustainability of Early Childhood Teachers in the Classroom."

I, _____,

the Principal of _____Primary School have read the outline and disclosure related to this study and give permission for the researcher, Pam Kilgallon, to speak to the staff at this educational site, seeking their permission to complete a survey, or to be involved in a Focus Group Discussion, which should last no longer than 40 minutes and to be conducted at a mutually arranged time.

I understand any data collated for this study will have identifying names and locations removed to preserve the participants' anonymity and professional integrity.

Signed_____ Date_____

Witnessed _____ Date_____

…….

Appendix C
Consent Form for Early Childhood Teachers

Early Childhood Teacher's Agreement to Participate in the Study-
"The Sustainability of Early Childhood Teachers in the Classroom."

I_____ a teacher for _____ years.
have read the disclosure, and any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction.

- ☐ I agree to participate in one of the focus groups sessions (which will be audio-taped), being conducted as part of this research study, on the condition that I have the right to withdraw at any time.

- ☐ I agree to participate in one of the case studies being conducted as part of this study, on the condition that I have the right to withdraw at any time.

I understand that the researcher and relevant supervisors will have access to the transcripts of my interviews and written notes, but that any identifying information will have been removed. I also understand I have the right to review transcripts related to my involvement as part of this study, to ensure their validity.

I agree that the research data gathered for this study may be published, provided I maintain my anonymity.

Participant_____Date_____

Researcher_____ Date_____

Appendix D
Letter to District Directors

The District Director
_____ District Education Office
Department of Education and Training.

RE: Intention of Research in Early Childhood Teachers' Sustainability

Dear_____,

My name is Pam Kilgallon. I am a permanent teacher (Id.######), currently on study-leave (LWOP) for the Year 2004, and intend to conduct research during this time as part of my doctoral thesis, "The Sustainability of Early Childhood Teachers in the Classroom."

As you would be aware our profession is undergoing numerous changes and teachers are being challenged in their ability to sustain their motivation and commitment to teaching, as well as proactively adopt educational changes and policies. Many teachers find it difficult to maintain job satisfaction and experience stress and burnout, or leave the profession before they reach retirement age. These trends have serious repercussions on the status and future of the teaching profession.

If research can identify factors that contribute to teacher sustainment, those entering the profession, as well as those already in the profession, may be encouraged to adopt strategies to maintain their enthusiasm and commitment to teaching. This will ultimately impact on the quality of students' education.

My qualitative study intends to investigate what factors contribute to early childhood teachers maintaining their job satisfaction, enthusiasm and engagement in the teaching process. To this intent, I propose to conduct 5 focus groups involving up to 10 early childhood teachers in each, where we will discuss issues related to their sustainability. I will also be conducting 6 case studies of experienced early childhood teachers (teachers who have taught more than 20 years). They will be involved in interviews and journal keeping.

I understand it is a courtesy to inform you of this study and that I will be approaching school principals and teachers within your district. Please find attached copies of the disclosure and consent forms I will be distributing. If you have any concerns regarding the nature of this study please contact me (Phone 9#######), or my university supervisor, Doctor Carmel Maloney (Phone 9#######) at Edith Cowan University.

Yours sincerely,
Pam Kilgallon.

Appendix E
Focus Group and Survey Questions

Research Study: *"The Sustainability of Early Childhood Teachers in the Classroom."*

Page One

Date of Participation _____

What factors contribute to your professional commitment?
(What makes you happy to be an early childhood teacher?)

What factors contribute to your job satisfaction?
(What makes you happy to teach?)

What factors contribute to you staying motivated in your teaching?
(What makes you continue teaching?)

Appendix E. (Continued)
Focus Group and Survey Questions
Page Two.

What helps you to sustain effective teaching practices?
(What has helped you to continue to develop yourself as a teacher?)

What strategies do you use to cope with the daily demands of teaching?

What strategies do you use to cope with educational change?

Please relate a positive and/or negative experience that you have worked through to be sustained in your profession.

Appendix F
Interview Schedule

Key points to cover in each case study interview.

Interview One- Teaching Background and Experiences

Where did you train?
Where did you teach?
What year levels have you taught?
What significant experiences do you recall?
Who or what was significant to your teaching?

Interview Two- Planning and Documentation Practices

How do you plan for your teaching and accountability?
How have your planning practices changed?
What forms of documentation do you use?

Interview Three- Daily Practice

How is your school day structured?
What practices do you employ to cope with your daily practice?
How and why have your practices changed?

Interview Four- Survey Questions
(refer to copy of the survey/focus group questions form)

What do you understand to mean by the terms used on the survey form?
What has sustained you in each of these traits?
What experiences have been significant to your sustainment?

Interview Five- Review of Key Sustaining Factors
(refer to individual summary sheets)

How significant are these factors to your sustainment in teaching?

Appendix G
Table 9.
Demographic Outline of the Study's Participants

Participant	Gender	Teaching Experience	Current Tchg Level	Survey	Focus Group	Case Study
1	F	20	PP	*		
2	F	20	PP	*		
3	F	20	PP	*		
4	M	17	PP	*		
5	F	15	P/1	*		
6	F	15	P/1	*		
7	F	15	PP	*		
8	F	15	N/A	*		
9	F	15	N/A	*		
10	F	14	N/A	*		
11	F	14	K	*		
12	F	14	PP	*		
13	F	14	N/A	*		
14	F	13	PP	*		
15	F	12	P/1	*		
16	M	7	N/A	*		
17	F	12	PP	*		
18	F	11	N/A	*		
19	F	10	1	*		
20	F	9	N/A	*		
21	F	9	N/A	*		
22	F	7	PP	*		
23	F	6	N/A	*		
24	F	5	PP	*		
25	F	2	1-3	*		
26	F	2	N/A	*		
27	F	N/A	PP	*		
28	F	N/A	N/A	*		
29	F	N/A	N/A	*		
30	F	21	P/1	*		
31	F	22	K	*		
32	F	22	N/A	*		
33	F	27	PP	*		
34	F	30	N/A	*		
35	F	12	K		1	
36	F	20	PP		1	
37	F	25	PP		1	
38	F	2	PP		2	
39	F	15	PP		2	
40	F	25	K		2	
41	F	5	K		3	
42	F	10	K/P		3	
43	F	10	K/P		3	
44	F	21	PP		3	
45	F	21	PP		3	
46	F	26	PP		3	
47	F	30	K		3	
48	F	3	K/P		3	
49	F	7	K/P		4	
50	F	8	PP		4	
51	F	9	PP		4	
52	F	10	K/P		4	
53	F	16	K/P		4	
54	F	23	PP		4	
55	F	25	K/P		4	
56	F	25	PP		4	
57	F	29	PP		4	
Barbara	F	21	P/1			*
Gwen	F	35	K/P			*
Rachel	F	23	K			*
Grace	F	23	P/1			*
Mel	F	24	1			*
Hilary	F	39	PP			*

Note. 63 Participants involved. F=female; M=male; tchg=teaching; N/A=not available; PP=pre-primary; K=kindergarten; P/1= pre-primary + kindergarten; K/P= kindergarten + pre-primary

Appendix H
Sample of a Case Study Participant's Transcripts
Interview Four with Mel
Date: 27th Sept. 2004
Time: 3.30 to 4.45pm *Page 56*

PK: What I want to cover today is the questions I asked in the focus groups and sent out in the surveys. First of all I want you to tell me what you think the term "professional commitment" means.

M: Professional commitment. Well, that to me, is more behaviour, attitudes, efforts that you make to achieving your professional goals, whether they're the goals you set yourself or the goals then set by your association, your employer, or the system. So, if you've got, in my mind if you've got a high level of commitment, well then you put a lot of effort, you put a lot of … you have a big strong positive attitude. You tend to be very much out there and up front, in terms of what you do. So therefore, a person with low professional commitment would be- well, you know, I'm here. You turn up on time. You're a warm body but not necessarily demonstrating a positive attitude towards things, you possibly don't take things on board. You don't give things a try.

So I think the degree to which you do those things demonstrates your commitment. And your commitment to your profession, those goals and objectives as set out by whatever it is you do.

PK: Having said that, how do you rate your professional commitment?

M: I would rate it pretty high. In terms of, I do the best I can, at the time that I can, I have. I do tend to take into account though the fact that I have a life outside of schools, so I'm not able to commit a 100%, so I would say if you were looking at me as a percentage, I'm probably in the 80% area, because I don't have the time to be more committed to something.

PK: So time is a big factor in it?

M: Time is a very big factor because, you know it's one thing to have the ideas and the attitudes but if that's all you've got, you're not putting in the effort. If you're not doing the reading or not putting together the program, then it's really sort of like people who drink decaf. coffee- why bother. The sense of involvement in what you do as part of your commitment would indicate that you haven't got the time, or you're not using your time to do work related things, then you're probably not as committed.

PK: Well how do you keep the commitment you have got, your 80%?

Appendix H (Continued)
Sample of a Case Study Participant's Transcripts (Continued)

M: Well I acknowledge that I will do some work at home on a regular basis. I acknowledge that I will do some work during the school holidays, on a regular basis. I acknowledge that I will be spending some of my income on resources, and I acknowledge that there are going to be times when I need to put in those unofficial unpaid overtime hours attending things at night, such as school presentations, the dances and all of that sort of thing. So I have an acknowledgement of that.

Interview Four with Mel (Continued) *Page 57*

M: Now most of the time that I put in is sort of measured out against of- I've got dogs to walk, I've got personal commitments, I've got family commitments.

PK: So it's a balancing?

M: It's a balancing act. And sometimes I have to prioritize my commitments and sometimes, professionally, that doesn't happen. If the weekend's been a disaster, such as my mother has had to be carted off to hospital, well I don't say- right that's it, I need to go and do some school work. I will matters first, a personal commitment, the first priority, whatever that takes. So that's why, as I say it's about 80%.

PK: So that's commitment to the profession, and doing your job, but what makes you happy to be a teacher, an early childhood teacher?

M: I think really the fact that with early childhood- I actually took some notes the other day (That's okay). I really enjoy working with the very young children because you can see the difference that what you do makes. It's not a case of Oh, you're here doing X, Y, Z, and you're never quite sure what the response is. With younger children you can see the response. So I like working with Year Ones because they come in not reading and writing and they go out with some development in that area.

I also like this age group because they're more fun to be with. You're not constantly thinking the power games of older children that they like to get into. I get very frustrated with that. You know, you said the other day- what do I get frustrated with- girls being girls as they get older. I have a low tolerance of that, and that doesn't happen at the earlier ages.

PK: So, almost an innocence, would it be?

M: It's an innocence and there's also you can get away with turning something into a joke. If somebody does something wrong, you say whatever, and not laughing at the kid but you say- oops! That's a mistake or whatever. Whereas with older children that can actually cause a lot of umbrage and you have to be careful about whatever you say and do. So I find it easier to be natural with the little ones.

Appendix H (Continued)
Sample of a Case Study Participant's Transcripts (Continued)

M: Except for 4th term where they're all go off with fangs and cactus and you have to go stomping on that.

I like the so-called Play Approach. I like that involvement and exploration of the environment, and general resources. It's sad, but you don't see much Mobilo in older classes, Mobilo, Duplo, Leggo.

PK: So a hands on?

M: Yeah, I really like that sort of stuff and I really think there's a greater acceptance at this age by the system, that if they're not ready for something, then you have to wait.

Interview Four with Mel (Continued) *Page 58*

M: I mean you can provide all the opportunities for them to develop in the meantime, but its when you get Year 4/5 there is the expectation that they can make sentences and that and they will write sentences.

PK: So there's no pressure, is what you're saying?

M: There's less pressure. There's a different kind of pressure, because it's developmentally based. So if you've got a child not yet ready, you still will need to be providing them with something to help them when they are ready, but you're sort of being held accountable for some child who is not capable of attending or doing. Although having said that, I still think the timetable is too full, there's not enough time for play.

PK: But that comes down again to time?

M: Yeah, it comes down again to time, but I do find that I can make more of it when I'm not thinking- oh my god, they've got a WALNA test at the end of Term 2, are they going to be able to read and write enough to show their potential, to show their capabilities or whatever. And then feel pressured to really push kids. I think really whenever I've had a child who's been dreadfully behind the 8 ball, it's just been a matter of time. Six months makes a huge difference to kids. And with Year Ones, particularly, you can give them that time and that's one of the benefits of having a 1 /2 and looping, because you get them the following year as your Year 2's, you know where they've been and there is this opportunity to support them in their next step.

PK: Do you want to move on to the next one? (Yes) Job satisfaction, what do you consider that to be?

Appendix H (Continued)
Sample of a Case Study Participant's Transcripts (Continued)

M: It's a little bit more that being contented. I mean I like to get up in the morning and look forward to the day and a lot of that is down to job satisfaction. Coming in and knowing that you've made a difference, or knowing that you achieved something. Knowing that in the children's work, is moving along and knowing that the kids are happy. And that's said in no particular order, because depending on what it is sometimes the kids being happy is more important than what they're achieved scholastically.

I like to come into a room that's full of stuff, not cluttered- although this one is at the moment, but showing all the different aspects that the kids have done.

PK: An enriched environment?

M: Yes, the old literature based stuff, with lots of labels. I just run out of time for labels! But I try and have a lot of print in the room. I try and make the room welcoming and interesting to the kids, and so if I come in the morning and turn the lights on and go- oh, yeah, I get job satisfaction. I feel like it's looking the way I like it to look.

Interview Four with Mel (Continued) *Page 59*

M: So being happy with what we're doing and looking forward to what we're doing, and feeling that you are achieving something I think all lead to job satisfaction.

PK: So, not just achievement in the children, but also a sense of personal achievement?

M: Mm, yeah, yeah. And for me, there are other things that add to that. There are other dimensions of that, the variety of what we do. You know one minute you could be doing a story, the next minute you could be doing a bit of fitness or physical activity outside, you might be doing a song. It's not like in an office job where you get there at 9 and you're still doing the same filing or whatever at lunchtime. During the morning, or during the day I should say, there's a whole variety.

And there's also the flexibility that when something, something else pops up- like the other day we'd come into do News and I realised that there was a cement mixer truck outside. We dropped that and went outside and took pieces of paper and sat there and drew the cement mixer. And I like that! That being able to do that makes me feel good with what I'm doing.

I like also the moving from school to school, and having to be flexible to cope with that. So that you're meeting new staff, you're meeting new people, new systems, new school expectations.

Appendix H (Continued)
Sample of a Case Study Participant's Transcripts (Continued)

PK: How long do you think you could cope staying in a school?

M: Well the longest I've been in a school is 5 years, and I was getting pretty strung out by the end of it. But, no I think that's incorrect. I think that by the time I got my transfer I was really looking forward to it. I just have a very limited shelf life, in terms of being in a school so long that you become part of the wallpaper. I just, that concept to me is just … not nice.

PK: But what about the friendships with colleagues?

M: Well I think if they're true friendship, they'll last, and it gives you an opportunity to meet people at other time. During the holidays, well I'll meet up with them on Wednesday and them Thursday. Laugh. And I think that's a really great opportunity. Also, you forget what the world is like if you stay too long in the school. There's a lot of people who've been in this school for many years, I'm thinking 9 +. And when they sit and they grizzle about things, I think to myself, well that's not so bas what you're experiencing here is pretty good. You know whatever it is, kid's behaviour or the amount of PD. I mean the amount of support you get here is phenomenal. I mean it doesn't mean to say… I'm reluctant… no that's not the word I want…I can appreciate what I've had in a school, and when I move from this school one of the things I will miss is the support you get from the Admin. in terms of – you know, I have need to take time off to attend to family matters and there's been- sure and is one day going to be enough? You know, how can we help you?

Interview Four with Mel (Continued) *Page 60*

M: That really positive attitude for the staff members here is something that you don't get in every school. But because I've moved around a fair bit I can recognise it for what it is. I can appreciate it, whereas some of the ladies here who've been here 9 years, at least they've had a number of principals, but they're not seeing what they're getting here as good. They don't see it as that. They've just got a lot of complaints and I think – well, hey, you go to a different school and you get a principal who really doesn't care about your personal problems, and is most reluctant to give you time to attend to those problems, you'll soon realise the difference and appreciate the difference.
So, yeah, I do make friendships here, in schools…

PK: So, it's not just the support, it's also being appreciated by the Admin.?

M: Mm, and I mean you also get different styles of leadership. It's good to have seen so many leaders. I think, out of all the schools I've been to, I have quite honestly had only 2 educational leaders in principals who have had some idea about what constitutes worthwhile teaching, methodology, pedagogy and have been able to lead people into doing it.

Appendix H (Continued)
Sample of a Case Study Participant's Transcripts (Continued)

M: I've meet a hell of a lot of principals who are great organisers, good administrators, they can find the money when a project comes up, or they can do a good timetable, but there were no people skills. And I've come across principals with wonderful people skills and couldn't organize a piss-up in a brewery! And it's just those sorts of things you get to see and appreciate when you're moving around. It adds to it. For me it adds another dimension to being happy to teach.

And then of course there's the hours, the work conditions and the pay. They're all worthwhile.

PK: All right. Do you want to move on? (Head nod). What do you consider keeps you motivated?

M: Oh, all of the above really. I do enjoy what I do. I do have fun. I enjoy the challenge and the stimulation. You know when you've got something that's not working and you need to adapt it, or something else happens and you can see the benefit of doing that new activity and finding a way to rekindle what you do. So I like that sort of challenge.

PK: So stimulation, you feel like you're learning with the students?

M: Yeah. A lot of the time. And I'm also a people person so I like being with the kids and – because they're children- they're a bit more forth right in their ideas and thoughts, and so …

PK: How about it you had to teach a classroom of adults?

M: I've worked with adults. I've taught adults through motor sport. And working with adults is harder, because adults don't give you any body response.

Interview Four with Mel (Continued) *Page 61*

M: They give you nothing in return as to the pace of what you're doing, whether you're going too fast for them, or whether you're touching stuff that they don't want to do. There's always the blank look! I also find that with adults I feel that I'm continually asking permission from them to do what I'm doing, because of that total lack of response.

PK: It's no the fact that you're…. that sounds wrong…that you're an authority figure with children?

M: Well no, I tend to find that when I work with adults I'm an authority figure anyway. People tend to treat me that way. And when I have been a volunteer at motor sport, I usually ended up being team leader. That's never been… it's something I've learnt to accept.

Appendix H (Continued)
Sample of a Case Study Participant's Transcripts (Continued)

M: That if I go somewhere… I mean right off I've done courses myself, I've gone as a student and I have sat down the back somewhere ready for the lecturer to come in and start, and gradually as people have come in they've looked at me and said, are you the lecturer. But I haven't opened my mouth. I've just sat there quietly minding my own business. I've got there early because the traffic conditions, or whatever, and I get- oh, are you the lecturer? No, I'm one of you lot. There is this attitude that for some reason, I must have a sign across my forehead obviously. So I … no, working with adults I can do, I prefer working with kids, but I have no problem with adults. In fact this weekend I'm going up to C- to work a whole mob of motor sport people there.

PK: So, I'm just defining the boundaries.

M: Yeah, yeah. I get more fun out of working with kids.

PK: So having fun is important?

M: It is, because basically I am a creative person and I'm reasonably playful. I've got a high level of organization skills and good communication skills, and honestly, where else could I use them! In terms of other careers.

PK: So the job suits your personality?

M: It does. It does to a great extent. And this year level is fantastic.

PK: Okay, thanks for that.

M: I have said on occasion where else could you paid to play the fool. *Laughter*.

PK: Yes, you have. I've got that on record. Okay, what helps you sustain effective teaching practices? What is it? What are effective teaching practices? *Plane flies overhead.*

M: And I'm assuming you mean for me personally. *Pause*

Interview Four with Mel (Continued) *Page 62*

PK: Yes, what do you consider to be effective teaching practices?

M: Well, being organized. And that means everything from your planning through to your records to your resources, and I'm just making that as a global statement. To cover all sorts of things. Having a sense of… you've got your planning but you are prepared to move away from it. So you're prepared to be flexible.

Appendix H (Continued)
Sample of a Case Study Participant's Transcripts (Continued)

PK: So flexibility would be something you would consider help you?

M: Yes, yes. I also have, because I'm what they call a "belt and braces" person, that means that you have one plan but you always have a back up plan. I also like to have a variety of fall back positions, so that if X doesn't work then I've got Y, and I've got Z, and failing that I could something else. And I find that helps you be flexible, so as I say, with the concrete truck, we were going to go onto News and Diary Writing, but I thought, no, this is a better opportunity, and we went out and drew the truck and talked to the truck driver. We came back inside, we put the pictures on the floor, we talked about trucks a lot more, we talked about sizes of trucks and what we thought a monster truck would be like and we really got involved in a whole lot of other things. By about recess, that point of interest was pretty well used up so after recess I was able to do, go back to my plan because I still had that. But, when it came to doing the maths activity I skewed the maths activity to fit in with the things that we'd seen on the truck.

So having that flexibility is great but that flexibility is only there because you've got the planning and you know how to link things in.

PK: So you also need to have a knowledge of how everything …

M: Connects together. Yes, yes.

PK: Where do you access that sort of knowledge?

M: Well I consider myself a lifelong learner. I'm continually looking at things, and into things and picking up books and that kind of thing. So I'm continually looking at stuff.
It's part of me…

PK: Would you rely mainly on books?

M: No, I use the Internet a lot, I use magazines, I use other people. Yeah, I use… tv, documentaries and stuff like that. I tend to have a good retentive memory for those sorts of things. So If I see something…

PK: So a good memory has helped you?

M: Well, yeah, it helps you be resourceful and also helps you if you've got…

Interview Four with Mel (Continued) *Page 63*

M: I mean in the back cupboard there I have a number of different kinds of resources, old newspapers and cuttings and stuff that I think might be useful one day. I don't tend to cull them, I tend to sort of dissipate.

Appendix H (Continued)
Sample of a Case Study Participant's Transcripts (Continued)

PK: You're a hoarder?

M: I am a hoarder, but I'm also a careful hoarder because I … because of moving. That gives you the chance to cull on a semi-regular basis. And having a rat in the cupboard helps as well- that was disgusting.

I also find that I'm actually getting better at trusting the kids, in terms of what they need and what their knowledge of things is, and their interests. When I first started teaching child-negotiated curriculum didn't exist and you had your Unit Progress in Reading and you did your first unit and you tested it and you did your second unit and you tested it and you did your third unit and you tested it, and then you passed them on to the next year's teacher. And really their level of interest, what they were interested in was sort of like a minor part of what you did. Then we got the whole of language and experience and language experience type thing came in and the kids were sort of nominally part of the deal as to what you looked at. But now I find if we are doing something and I can say to them – well how would you do that? Not having any fixed ideas of my own, and they might come up with a chart or a poster or we could do a play or … and I'm finding that I'm now able to- okay, let's do that. Because, I'm accepting now that the learning that they do when they do those activities is as valid as when they do when I set the scene.

And also I found the less you fiddle with something, the more likely it will work out really well. It's a case of this old saying- you can do without doing, the old Taoist philosophy. In Chinese Taoism, where you have the blank slate and the story will write itself, and you get that if you let things flow they will happen. I don't know if you've ever been in that situation.

PK: I'm trying to think of a word to describe that.

M: The nearest analogy is when you want to get from A to B when you're driving, and instead of pushing hard and trying to get ahead of the traffic and trying to anticipate the traffic, and working hard, you just go with the flow. And you get to where you're going, you get there safely, you get there in a relaxed state of mind. You get there without having thrashed the car. Whereas by just letting it go, by just I need to get from A to B and pushing it hard.

PK: Minimal effort.

M: Yeah, yeah, but minimal effort that's intelligent effort. You know, it's not a case of being inactive, but just going with the flow. It's all part of the philosophy of the lazy teacher. *Laughter.*

PK: Thank you.