

**AN EXPLORATION OF THE  
PROFESSIONAL KNOWLEDGE LANDSCAPE  
OF EARLY CHILDHOOD TEACHERS  
IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS**

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## ABSTRACT

*Prior to the 1970s, it was recognised in New South Wales that teachers who worked in the early years of primary school should have specialist teacher education. It is reasonable to suggest, however, that the majority of teachers currently employed in Australian primary schools completed a generalist primary teacher education program. There is a small group of teachers who work in these settings who have completed specialist early childhood teacher education. Little is currently known about the experiences of these teachers and the extent to which they believe they are able to implement early childhood approaches within the primary context. This research aimed to explore how early childhood teachers working within primary schools perceived the influence of three aspects of the professional knowledge landscape (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995), (a) their personal beliefs and experiences, (b) their early childhood teacher education, and (c) the school environment and culture. Characteristics of schools that the teachers believed supported or discouraged early childhood practices in the early years of school were also investigated.*

*Data was collected by conducting in-depth interviews with eight early childhood teachers working in the early years of primary school. Findings were analysed by a process of reading and re-reading interview transcripts to identify emergent themes.*

*Findings indicated that the teachers felt they were significantly influenced both by their personal beliefs and experiences, and their early childhood teacher education. These two aspects were perceived by the teachers to be compatible and in many cases had merged into a unified belief system about teaching. The school context was influential in relation to class size, physical environment, the curriculum, and school cultures. Recommendations are made for schools, the NSW Department of Education and Training, the Board of Studies NSW and teacher education programs to increase support for early childhood teachers in the first years of primary school.*

## INTRODUCTION

Internationally, the early childhood period is recognised as extending from birth to eight years. In Australia this usually includes children in the first three years of compulsory schooling. Prior to the 1970s, it was recognised in New South Wales (NSW) primary schools that teachers who worked in the early years of school should have specialist teacher education (Gifford, 1992). Today, it may be assumed that most teachers in the NSW primary system, including those who work within the K-2 environment, graduated from a more generalist primary teacher education program. The exact number of early childhood teachers working in primary schools is difficult to obtain, as government departments in most Australian states do not appear to maintain such records. Ten years ago, Gifford (1992) suggest there were relatively few early childhood teachers in primary schools and it is difficult to obtain more recent data to confirm these claims. Hayden (2000) suggests that economic pressures on Australian universities have resulted in an increasingly generalist approach being taken to the education of teachers who work in primary schools. That is, teachers are expected to work across the entire Kindergarten to Year Six range. This occurs despite indications of support within the government for early childhood teachers and approaches in the first years of school (Dockett & Lambert, 1996; NSW Department of Education and Training (NSW DET), 1999; NSW Department of School Education, 1997; Senate Employment, Education and Training References Committee, 1996). For example, as a result of their inquiry into early childhood education, the Senate Employment, Education and Training References Committee (1996) recommended that "where appropriately qualified early childhood trained teachers are available, they should be given priority over generalist teachers for appointments to positions at the junior primary school level" (p.87). There is a small group of teachers who work in NSW primary schools who have completed

specialist early childhood teacher education. Little is currently known about the experiences of these teachers and the extent to which they believe they are able to implement early childhood approaches within the primary school context. This study is an attempt to address this lack of knowledge.

## THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN EARLY CHILDHOOD AND PRIMARY EDUCATION

Philosophical and pedagogical differences between early childhood and primary education are widely recognised (Bloch, 1987; Goldstein, 1997; Hayden, 2000). Goldstein (1997) summarises these as "distinctly different histories, traditions, perspectives, expectations, practices, values, and school cultures" (p.30). Early childhood education tends to be associated with individualised programming based upon knowledge of the child's developmental characteristics and interests, and family and community context (Hayden, 2000; NSW Department of Community Services (NSW DOCS), 1998). Early childhood approaches usually include learning through play, hands on activities with concrete materials, and the social construction of knowledge. Early childhood teachers complete specialised education to provide such programs (Macquarie University, 2001a; 2001b; Hayden, 2000). In contrast, primary education is often perceived as focussing on teacher-directed learning organised around predetermined or state mandated curriculum based on specific subject areas (NSW DET, 2002a). These differences may make the position of early childhood teachers in NSW primary schools potentially problematic.

### EARLY CHILDHOOD TEACHERS IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS

An extensive search of the literature revealed the limited scope of research related to the experiences of early childhood teachers in primary schools. Most studies that were identified have been conducted in overseas contexts and with teachers who did not necessarily have specific early childhood qualifications. The existing research also often focuses on one aspect of early childhood education such as the implementation of developmentally appropriate practice. The research that does exist, however, suggests that a range of issues may influence teachers who wish to implement early childhood approaches in schools. These include negotiating the position of play in the curriculum (Goldstein, 1997; Jones, Dockett, Perry & Westcott, 2002; Olsen & Sumsion, 2002), the expectations of parents and colleagues (Goldstein, 1997; Stipek & Byler, 1997), the requirements of schools and governing bodies (Goldstein, 1997; Olsen & Sumsion, 2002; Rusher, McGrevin & Lambiotte, 1992; Stipek & Byler, 1997; Vartuli, 1999), and the use of time and physical space (Jones et al., 2002; Olsen & Sumsion, 2002).

The most relevant Australian research identified was conducted by Sawyer (2000). She explored the experiences of Queensland early childhood teachers who made the transition from preschool to primary school settings. This inquiry found that the early childhood teachers viewed themselves as different from primary teachers, and continued to associate with early childhood approaches such as the use of play in children's learning, partnerships with families and colleagues, and responsiveness to individual needs. The early childhood teachers in the study also felt that their primary colleagues were dismissive of such approaches and these differences often impacted negatively upon collegial relationships.

### THE PROFESSIONAL KNOWLEDGE LANDSCAPE

The aim of the research was to explore the professional knowledge landscape of early childhood teachers working in primary schools. The professional knowledge landscape is a metaphor developed by Clandinin and Connelly (1995) for understanding the complexity of

teachers' lives and the relationships between their knowledge, beliefs, experiences and the context in which the work. Clandinin and Connelly began their influential research into teacher knowledge twenty years ago (Connelly, Clandinin & He, 1997). The title for this section is taken from their book *Teachers' Professional Knowledge Landscapes* (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995) and is a metaphor for understanding teachers' professional knowledge as something that encompasses many components and is influenced by many "people, places, and things" (p.5).

A simplistic view of teachers' professional knowledge might include knowledge gained through teacher education, such as understandings about children, teaching practices and curriculum. In other words, it would relate to what teachers do in their classrooms. The reality, however, is likely to be more complex. During their work with teachers, Clandinin and Connelly (1995) were often reminded that teachers neither work in isolation, nor in completely self-chosen environments. As a result, they developed an interest not just in teachers' in-classroom experiences, but also in their out-of-classroom and personal life experiences (Connelly et al., 1997). They came to believe that each aspect of the professional knowledge landscape is interwoven and inseparable when attempting to understand an individual as a teacher (Connelly et al., 1997).

The professional knowledge landscape is "located at the crossroads where teachers' personal knowledge and professional knowledge meet" and "connects teachers' personal practical knowledge with the contexts of teaching" (Craig, 1999, p.398). For the purposes of this inquiry, the areas of the teachers' professional knowledge landscape that are of interest include (a) personal beliefs and experiences, (b) early childhood teacher education, and (c) the school environment and culture.

Some previous research relating to the three aspects of the professional knowledge landscape was identified. These studies indicated that personal beliefs and experiences have a strong influence on teachers and should be taken into consideration when attempting to understand their perspectives (Bullough, 1991; Connelly, Clandinin & He, 1997; Gabel, 2001; Goodson & Walker, 1991; Hawkey, 1996; Mitchell & Weber, 1999). In contrast, the influence of teacher education is contested in the literature. The existing research addresses a range of teacher education programs and the specific nature of these programs is suggested as a factor in the disparate nature of the findings (Charlesworth, Hart & Burts, 1991; Wilcox-Herzog, 2002). The literature suggests that the final aspect of the professional knowledge landscape, the school environment and culture, may produce a variety of supports and constraints as teachers attempt to enact their ideal teaching orientations (Wood & Bennett, 2000). The level of congruence between a teacher's ideals and beliefs, and the contextual norms and expectations are highlighted as particularly important for beginning teachers (Cole, 1992; Cole & Knowles, 1993; Hawkey, 1996).

Fleer (2002) highlights the need for Australian studies in the field of early childhood education because the "different government priorities, legislation, schooling philosophy ... makes it difficult to generalise findings from overseas studies to the Australian context" (p.34-35). She also highlights the need for Australian research into the effects of practices traditionally associated with primary education, such as outcomes-based education and timetables, on the work of early childhood teachers. Due to the paucity of existing research, particularly within the local context, an exploration of the professional knowledge landscape of early childhood teachers in primary schools was viewed as an important goal.

## RESEARCH AIMS

The research identified the teachers' perceptions in relation to:

- a. how they were influenced by three aspects of the professional knowledge landscape:
  - personal beliefs and experiences,
  - their early childhood teacher education,
  - the primary school environment and culture, and
- a. characteristics of schools that may support or discourage early childhood practices in the early years of school.

## RESEARCH METHODS

The aims of this study related not to observable phenomena, but to the perceptions and beliefs of the participants. The focus was on exploring the meanings attached to experiences by a particular group of people in a particular context. For this reason the inquiry fell within an interpretivist paradigm. Schwandt (1994) indicates that this term generally points to an interest in understanding the experiences of participants from the participants' point of view. What was to be known in the inquiry, therefore, was not an objective reality, but the subjective perspective constructed by the participants. Due to the originality of the study, a broad, exploratory approach was taken to enable the participants' perceptions of the most important aspects of the professional knowledge landscape to emerge.

### Participants

Eight teachers with undergraduate qualifications in early childhood education currently working in the early years of primary school were invited to participate in the study. Schools in which the participants were employed included the public and independent sectors, and were classified as P-6, K-6, P-12 and preparatory (P-2). Some participants had worked in other early childhood settings prior to working in primary schools, while others had entered primary schools direct from their teacher education. In terms of teacher education, seven participants held a Bachelor of Education (Early Childhood Education) and one held a Diploma of Teaching (Early Childhood). Two teachers initially began studies in primary education before specialising in early childhood. One teacher previously completed an Associate Diploma in early childhood studies before attaining the Bachelor of Education (Early Childhood Education). Some teachers began their teacher education as mature age students whereas others went to university directly from high school. Teaching experience ranged from two to thirteen years. The average length of teaching experience was 6.25 years. Two of the teachers had previously worked as classroom teachers but were currently teaching reading recovery and teacher release. The diversity of participants is believed to reflect the variety of experiences encountered by early childhood teachers and provided depth to the study by ensuring a range of experiences and settings were reflected.

### Data Collection

Due to the nature of the research aims, a qualitative interviewing technique described by Taylor and Bogdan (1998, p.88) and Marshall and Rossman (1999, p.108) as "in-depth interviewing" was used to collect data. This involves "repeated face-to-face encounters between the researcher and informants directed toward understanding informants' perspectives on their lives, experiences, or situations as expressed in their own words" (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998, p.88). Wellington (2000) regards interviews as a method of empowering people, giving them a "voice", an opportunity to make their viewpoints and perspectives known. Early childhood teachers working in primary schools may be viewed as a relative minority group within the school context. They have also been identified as a group that has received little research focus. Providing these teachers with a voice to describe their

experiences, beliefs and perceptions, therefore, became an important goal of this study. In-depth interviewing was seen as an appropriate method for achieving this goal.

Two in-depth interviews were held with seven participants. The eighth teacher was only interviewed once due to a lack of participant availability. The first interview was based upon an interview schedule while the second interview was individualised as a result of the initial interview and emerging interpretations. Participants were provided with the opportunity to read interview transcripts and interpretations and to comment on their accuracy or clarify meaning.

Prior to the first interview, a day was spent in each teacher's classroom. The purpose of this visit was not to collect observational data, but to provide an opportunity to become familiar with the specific context in which each teacher worked and to build rapport with the participant. The classroom visit helped to inform the interview process, as well as providing a context for interpretation of interview responses.

### Interpretation of Data

The first stage of data interpretation occurred throughout the data collection process as suggested by Taylor and Bogdan (1998) and Miles and Huberman (1994). This involved reading and re-reading the first interviews to identify connections from one interview to another, at times highlighting an issue that would be interesting to explore further.

Then, a summary of each of the first interviews was compiled. Miles and Huberman (1994) suggest this procedure as a useful early analytical step. They suggest that it is important to reflect on the major issues that arose from contact with a participant in order to avoid becoming lost in the detail of the transcript. Important themes were identified and summarised in point form on the summary sheet, along with the page number on which the comment could be found. This organisation of themes helped to identify questions that should be asked in the second interview.

When data collection was complete, themes and codes were identified and refined through an intuitive process of re-reading the data and summary sheets. The themes and codes were constantly refined as connections were made between the data and the aims of the research.

## FINDINGS

### The Merging of Personal Beliefs and Experiences, and Early Childhood Teacher Education

Findings indicated the participants were influenced by each of the three aspects of the professional knowledge landscape.

#### Personal Beliefs and Experiences

Each of the participants thought that the personal aspect of the professional knowledge landscape had influenced them as a teacher. In particular, participants mentioned:

- the influence of motherhood

*You're coming from a very different perspective if you've been a mother first, and a teacher second. ... I think I have a lot of time for parents. And I'm really aware of what parents expect and I try and do lots of parent inservices and*

*involve parents in my programs and in decision making [at] the executive level.*

- the teacher's own childhood school experiences

*I remember every teacher I ever had and they've all had either a positive or negative impact on me and made me the teacher that I am today. I'd never humiliate a child in front of the rest of the class because I've had that experience. And then I've had other teachers that, they were phenomenal, they were great, they made learning so much fun. So I bring that into it as well.*

### Early Childhood Teacher Education

The early childhood teacher education of the participants had also been highly influential upon them and they maintained a belief in early childhood philosophies and practices as the most appropriate approach for working with young children in the early years of school.

*Being provided with that vision for four years and different examples of how people have done it, and them showing us the benefits of it, and why they do it. That really made me value it.*

Philosophical themes mentioned by the majority of the participants included issues relating to the image of the child and the teacher. For example, in relation to children, participants mentioned:

- respecting children and valuing their contributions,
- viewing children as competent,
- giving children control of their own learning,
- giving children responsibility and encouraging independence,
- allowing children to learn for themselves and construct their own knowledge,
- working collaboratively with children,
- treating children as individuals,
- viewing the child as a whole, and
- within the broader context of their family and community.

In relation to the image of the teacher, the participants generally mentioned:

- the teacher as facilitator who helped children to learn rather than directing them and imparting knowledge
- teachers should not be placed on pedestals, seen as all knowing and always right.

*Seeing children as individuals, the fact that it's very important for children to be in control of their own learning. The fact that they need to really build on their own knowledge so they're constructing further knowledge from what's already there. ... Treating the children with respect and dignity. ... Treating them as individuals at different levels. ... I came into teaching very keen to be a facilitator of learning, for it to be child centred rather than teacher centred.*

Early childhood teaching practices that many of the participants believed were beneficial for children's learning and development included:

- the importance of providing opportunities for play

- observing children on a regular basis to gather information relating to their abilities and behaviour
- pedagogical documentation
- communicating and working collaboratively with parents
- integrated curriculum
- hands-on experiences
- reflective practice and ongoing evaluation to improve practice

### Integration

The personal beliefs and experiences of these teachers had fitted well with their early childhood teacher education. These two aspects of the professional knowledge landscape had become interwoven for many of the participants into an integrated, personal belief about appropriate practices for working with young children.

*So I guess those two things [motherhood and Christian beliefs] come quite strongly into play. And my early childhood training as a teacher would have actually, I think, under girded that. There was nothing in our course at Macquarie that would have gone against any of that at all. In fact that training would have strengthened those feelings or those beliefs that I already had there in place.*

*I think you forget what you actually learnt because it is within you and it's a very fine line as to whether you learnt it at uni or whether it's just part of you and who you are. So I think a lot of the things I do, I've certainly learnt at uni but I think it was always within me anyway, just my personality and how I treat people. As I said before, the university theory, it just strengthens what you do.*

### Discussion

The teachers entered the school context with a strong image of self as teacher. Hawkey (1996) suggests that for beginning teachers, a lack of congruence between their teacher image and contextual influences may be problematic. Cole and Knowles (1993) suggested that ideal teacher images may be "shattered" by the realities of the school context (p.457). This did not seem to be the case for the participants in this study, although they did find the third aspect of the professional knowledge landscape, the school environment and culture more difficult to negotiate. Beginning early childhood teachers felt inadequately prepared by their early childhood teacher education for the school context, particularly for curriculum issues. With experience, however, they were able to discover opportunities for working flexibly within the constraints of the school context and believed that with time they would be able to implement more appropriate early childhood approaches. Teachers with more confidence were able to promote the use of early childhood approaches and have a reciprocal influence upon the school context.

The findings of this study provide further support for the body of research highlighting the influence of personal beliefs and experiences on teachers. There is debate in the literature about the extent of the influence of teacher education programs. The findings support the suggestion of Charlesworth, et al. (1991) and Wilcox-Herzog (2002) that the strength of teacher education is a factor in the influence of teacher education. The teacher education that the participants were involved in was long in duration, theoretically strong, and linked this theoretical knowledge with practical knowledge and experience. The resulting teacher education was highly influential upon the participants.

In addition to personal beliefs and experiences, the participants in this inquiry seemed to believe that their teacher education was also influential on them. Indeed, this study has suggested that it is important to consider the influence of both these aspects when attempting to understand teachers' perspectives. Both can be influential and, in fact, when complementary, can further strengthen each other to merge into a unified and powerful personal belief about education. There is some evidence in this study to suggest that the level of congruence between personal beliefs and teacher education is an important issue for teachers and should be addressed in teacher education programs.

### Influence of the School Environment and Culture

The school context provided participants with many barriers and some supports for early childhood approaches in the early years of school. The major themes that emerged as supports or barriers included class size, physical environment, the curriculum, and school culture.

#### Class Size

Class sizes influenced each participant. Large class sizes in a primary school were perceived to be a barrier to the implementation of approaches such as individualising programs, focusing on children's strengths rather than weaknesses, incorporating children's interests into the program, the documentation of in-depth investigations and the use of observations to inform practice.

*You realise you're working with such big groups of children that you can't always do things how you want to do them. ... In an ideal world you would have an individual program for every child, but in a school where you have 28 children in a class that's just not possible.*

Conversely, small class sizes were perceived to be supportive of individualising programs, observing children in a regular and systematic manner to inform planning, and allowing the curriculum to emerge based upon children's interests, needs and lives.

*We like the small community and the very individualised attention that the children get here. And that's where the early childhood comes in too, we have differentiated learning programs here so each child is looked at as an individual.*

#### Physical Environment

Like class size, the physical environment could be either a support or a barrier to the implementation of early childhood approaches for participants. Teachers who were lucky enough to work in spacious classrooms were able to use the environment in a variety of ways. Many teachers, however, were constrained by small classrooms and a lack of facilities such as wet areas. Small classrooms made it difficult for teachers to use learning centres, to have permanent play areas, and be flexible in grouping children for deskwork. Lack of a wet area was a barrier to the use of messy activities such as art for many teachers. Some teachers were able to use the physical environment flexibly in order to overcome the constraints of a small classroom, for example using hallways and outdoor spaces.

*You've got to make the most of what you've got. You're not going to go ... to every school and ... have a wonderful big classroom. ... You have to make do. ... You [might] have to squish 27 into a little room like that. You have to be adaptable ... go outside and have your science centre.*

## Curriculum

The pressure to teach Key Learning Areas (KLAs) and meet syllabus outcomes was a major theme throughout the interviews. Many teachers felt that the syllabus documents were too crowded, particularly for the youngest children.

*You're just expected to do more and more and more and more and there's more curriculums coming at you. ... The worst one [key learning area] is PDHPE which has about 52 outcomes in it. It's just impossible. If I taught PDHPE all day, every day, I still wouldn't meet [all the outcomes]. ... It is overcrowded and it is getting more and more so.*

This led to a focus on achieving externally determined syllabus outcomes with little or no room left for curriculum that emerged from the interests and needs of the children in the class. The way in which curriculum was implemented in many schools through the use of a scope and sequence system and units of work from the syllabus support documents resulted in the possibility of teachers implementing curriculum that was not of interest or relevance to the children.

*You end up trying to enhance the dry units of work. ... We did Wet and Dry Environments last term and I found it a little bit boring. ... It was not the most exciting topic, and I thought, "Oh God we've got HSIE today". So you can imagine how the kids feel if the teacher is not enthusiastic about it.*

The basis of the problems that the teachers experienced in relation to the curriculum is that in the school context the curriculum is often limited to the contents of the syllabus documents for the six KLAs. Schools also often focussed upon the six KLAs and the syllabus documents that accompany them as separate curriculum areas. This made it difficult for teachers to integrate curriculum areas or focus on content other than the syllabus documents. In these circumstances, it was almost impossible to enable the curriculum to emerge based upon the children's interests, needs and daily lives. It also resulted in a focus on achievement of externally determined outcomes.

Schools that provided greater flexibility in curriculum provided more scope for programs that were meaningful to the children and teacher, that integrated curriculum areas, and moved beyond the achievement of syllabus outcomes.

*I feel that I'm achieving much more. ... There's really sophisticated things happening in this room. And I'd hat to think that if I had a different mindset and I thought, "Okay, stage one", then that would lose so much of what is happening here. So I think the [syllabus] documents are important for helping teachers recognise what at least they should be doing. But I think they should be a benchmark for moving them into even more exciting, challenging work.*

Strict timetables and the use of many specialist teachers also resulted in the different KLAs becoming fragmented and difficult to integrate.

*You've got restrictions such as timetables. ... My kids see five different specialist teachers throughout the week ... and I've got limited time with my class. I only actually teach English, maths, science and HSIE. The rest is all done by specialists, so it's very hard to have that integrated learning.*

Timetable constraints and the overcrowded curriculum also made it difficult for teachers to find a space for play in their program, particularly beyond Kindergarten.

*Unfortunately the priority goes to getting through other curriculum things and I don't have time to leave an afternoon where the children can have free play.*

### School Cultures

School cultures and collegial relationships strongly influenced teachers' experiences in schools. Cultures that promoted innovation, professional development and positive collegial relationships were easier places for the teachers to work. In these schools, colleagues were able to provide support, particularly for beginning teachers, and teachers felt valued for the different perspective and new ideas they brought to the school.

*I think we have a very open, sharing culture at this school. ... We always have shared resources and often plan together. ... We have quite a lot of professional development and staff meetings. ... There are a lot of enthusiastic people on staff who are wanting to try things. ... It is part of our culture - development and growth.*

In contrast, schools that were more individualistic, hierarchically structured and less open to change did not provide support for the teachers to work in alternative ways or to have an impact upon the context. This kind of culture was particularly difficult for beginning teachers.

*As a beginning teacher, that individualistic way, awful, awful, you just feel like you're drowning. I was so overwhelmed last year it wasn't funny.*

*Sometimes I felt I was on my own. And you don't want to ask six million questions to everybody else because they're so busy.*

*At the last school they were a lot younger, a lot more dynamic, there was a lot more discussion. This school, people have been here 10 or 15 years and they're a lot happier just doing their role and keeping quiet and not having to take on anything new.*

### Discussion

The school context provided participants with many barriers and some supports for early childhood approaches in the early years of school. Many of the findings with relation to the influences of the school environment and culture were supported by the recently released NSW Public Education Inquiry (NSW DET, 2002b). These include teachers' perceptions of the negative impact of large classes, small classrooms and an overcrowded curriculum on teaching practice.

The findings of this research extend on the suggestions of previous studies that class size (Olsen & Sumsion, 2002) and the physical environment (Jones et al., 2002; Olsen & Sumsion, 2002) may influence teachers' decision to implement play in the classroom. This research suggests that these two factors may be influential on early childhood teachers' perceived ability to implement a variety of early childhood approaches. Other literature suggests a link between class size and classroom space (Hall & Nattall, 1999; Day, Tolley, Hadfield, Parkins & Watling, 1996). Obviously, as class size increases, classroom space is reduced.

The findings of this study also support previous research by Goldstein (1997) and Olsen and Sumsion (2002) which suggest that the requirements of the official curriculum may be problematic for teachers attempting to implement early childhood approaches. The finding that relationships with colleagues were important to the participants and impacted upon their

experiences in the school adds to the body of literature that points to the importance of collegial relationships in the school context (Barblett, 2000; Corrie, 1996; Hargreaves, 1994; Sawyer, 2000; Wood & Bennett, 2000). Support is also provided for Sawyer's (2000) finding that early childhood teachers working in primary settings view themselves as different from their primary colleagues and maintain their association with early childhood philosophy and practices.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations may be drawn from the findings of this study for schools, governing bodies and teacher education programs. These recommendations are made within the NSW context in recognition of the focus of the study, which was limited to the local context.

Recommendation 1: Schools could provide greater support for early childhood teachers by encouraging an integrated approach to education and allowing greater flexibility concerning timetables and curriculum implementation. Also, taking steps to further promote collegiality and professional development, providing greater support for new teachers, and encouraging a greater interest in innovation would help early childhood teachers feel more comfortable and thrive within the school culture.

Recommendation 2: The NSW DET could support early childhood teachers by reducing class sizes in the early years of school and improving physical conditions within schools, particularly by providing more spacious classrooms with a wet area.

Recommendation 3: The Board of Studies NSW could support early childhood teachers by expanding their current efforts to promote an integrated approach to curriculum, and by assessing whether the focus on syllabus documents and outcomes in the early years of school is developmentally appropriate.

Recommendation 4: Teacher education programs could better prepare early childhood teachers for the school context by providing a greater focus on KLAs, syllabus documents, and implementation of curriculum within the school context using early childhood approaches. Teacher education programs should also ensure they address the influence of preservice teachers' personal beliefs and experiences.

The results of this inquiry are based upon interviews with eight teachers and the findings, therefore, are not generalisable. They do, however, indicate some possible avenues for future research to ascertain the extent to which these findings are relevant to a larger number of participants. This study was based predominantly upon interview data and, therefore, the findings stem from the beliefs and perceptions of the participants. Given the scope of this study it is not possible to assess the extent to which these teachers' practices have actually been influenced by the three aspects of the professional knowledge landscape. Future research could use observational data to assess the relationship between the teachers' perceptions of the influence of the professional knowledge landscape and actual teaching practices.

In conclusion, this study has made significant contributions both theoretically and practically. Early childhood approaches for children in the first years of schools are receiving increasing support from senior policy makers in Australia. Currently, there is a paucity of research in relation to early childhood teachers in primary schools. This study has provided important insights into the professional knowledge landscape of early childhood teachers in NSW primary schools. As a result of the insights that emerged during the study, two major contributions were made. First, the study has added to the existing literature by exploring the metaphor of the professional knowledge landscape and the influence on teachers of

personal beliefs and experiences, teacher education, and school contexts. Second, by illuminating the experiences of early childhood teachers in primary schools, recommendations were made for schools, the NSW DET, the Board of Studies NSW, and teacher education programs. These recommendations will provide greater support for early childhood teachers and approaches in primary schools, thereby improving the experiences and outcomes of children in the first years of school.

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