THE EXPLORATION OF PRESCHOOL TEACHERS' UNDERSTANDING AND CLASSROOM EXPERIENCE OF SOCIO-EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN EARLY CHILDHOOD AND THE ROLE IT PLAYS IN SCHOOL READINESS.

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Keywords: Cape Town, classroom behaviour, classroom experience, early childhood development, preschool teachers, preschool children, socio-emotional development, school readiness, social learning theory, thematic analysis.

DECLARATION

I declare that THE EXPLORATION OF PRESCHOOL TEACHERS' UNDERSTANDING AND CLASSROOM EXPERIENCE OF SOCIO-EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN EARLY CHILDHOOD AND THE ROLE IT PLAYS IN SCHOOL READINESS is my own work, that all the sources used has been completely cited and referenced in accordance with the American Psychological Association (6th edition) referencing style.

Tessa Jane Goldschmidt

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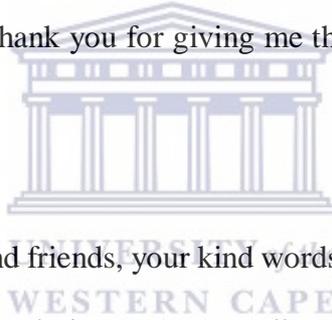
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DEFINITIONS OF TERMS

The following terms and definitions were used during the course of this research study:

Early childhood development: refers to an umbrella term that applies to the processes by which children grow and thrive mentally, physically, emotionally, socially, spiritually, and morally from birth to at least nine years of age (Department of Education, 2001).

Preschool teacher: refers to an individual providing early education prior to Grade 1.

Preschool: refers to the early schooling years prior to Grade 1.

Socio-emotional development: refers to the acquisition of a set of skills involving the ability to identify and understand one's own feelings, to manage strong emotions and their expression in a positive manner, to accurately read and understand the emotional states in others, to develop empathy for others, to regulate one's own behaviour, and to establish and maintain relationships (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2005).

School readiness: refers to "the state of child competencies at the time of school entry that were important for later success" (Snow, 2006, p. 9), which includes both socio-emotional and pre-academic competencies (Raver, Garner & Smith-Donald, 2007).

ABSTRACT

The socio-emotional development of children has an extremely important impact on the overall development of children. Globally, extensive research has been dedicated to the socio-emotional development of children with regard to play, socio-emotional programmes, school readiness and school success. However, there is limited current research within the South African context relating to socio-emotional development in early childhood and its importance for school readiness, specifically from the views of educators. This study explored preschool teachers' understanding and classroom experience of socio-emotional development in early childhood and the role it plays in school readiness. This study utilises the Albert Bandura's social learning theory which posits that adults function as "environmental experts who model appropriate behaviours and structures the environment" in ways that encourage appropriate behaviours in children. A qualitative methodological framework with an exploratory research design was used. A total of 12 preschool teachers from both community-based preschools and primary schools with a Grade R programme were recruited. Data were collected with semi-structured interviews and analysed thematically in accordance with Braun and Clarke (2006). Participants' rights such as informed consent, anonymity and confidentiality were guaranteed throughout the research process. Ethics guidelines stipulated by the Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee at the University of the Western Cape were strictly adhered to. The main findings were that preschool teachers understand socio-emotional development as consisting of inter- and intrapersonal skills. Teachers viewed themselves as role models who encourage and model appropriate and prosocial behaviour in the classroom. Lastly, preschool teachers view age appropriate development in all areas as absolutely essential for school readiness.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CAPS:	National Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement
DoBE:	Department of Basic Education
DoE:	Department of Education
DoSD:	Department of Social Development
ECD:	Early Childhood Development
Grade R:	Reception Year
NELDS:	National Early Learning Development Standards
NIECDP:	National Integrated Early Childhood Development Policy
SED:	Socio-emotional development
Stats SA:	Statistics South Africa
WCED:	Western Cape Education Department
WHO:	World Health Organisation
UNICEF:	United Nations Children's Fund

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

The socio-emotional development in early childhood has an impact on the overall development of children (Yong, 1993) and is important for both academic performance and life success (Aviles, Anderson & Davila, 2006; Fantuzzo, Bulotsky-Shearer, Fasco & McWayne, 2005; Mashburn & Henry, 2004). Socio-emotional development in young children involves the acquisition of a set of skills involving the ability to identify and understand one's own feelings, to manage strong emotions and their expression in a positive manner, to accurately read and understand the emotional states in others, to develop empathy for others, to regulate one's own behaviour, and to establish and maintain relationships (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2005). Acquiring socio-emotional skills not only allows children to make friends, express their feelings and thoughts, cope with frustration in a meaningful and positive manner, but importantly enables children to learn from their parents and teachers (Cohen, Onunaku, Clothier & Poppe, 2005) who model appropriate and positive behaviour. Thus, without these skills, children will ultimately not be as ready for the learning environment as their peer counterparts who have achieved age-appropriate socio-emotional development.

The foundation of socio-emotional development begins in infancy from the care that children receive. In order for children to thrive developmentally they require warm and responsive caregiving (World Health Organisation [WHO], United Nations Children's Fund [UNICEF] & World Bank Group, 2018). Responsive caregiving entails nurturing children, keeping them safe, healthy and well-nourished, being attentive and responding to their needs and interests, encouraging them to explore their surroundings and interact with those within their environment (WHO et al., 2018, p. 12). However, not all children are raised in environments that facilitate healthy development. This may be due to a number of factors such

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as poor attachment relationships, environmental risk factors such as abuse, stress, and poverty (Bierman et al., 2008; Thompson & Happold, 2002). Regardless of the background and experiences from which children come, teachers are in the unique position to create an environment in which they can play a positive role in children's socio-emotional development. In the classroom setting, teachers become the caregivers who help children to identify and interpret their feelings (Aviles, Anderson & Davila, 2006), which may help children to become more socio-emotionally competent and ready for school.

An important prerequisite for school readiness and future academic success is related to young children's ability to effectively manage their emotions and behaviours as well as being able to form meaningful friendships (Webster-Stratton & Reid, 2004). School readiness has been defined by Snow (2006, p. 9) as "the state of child competencies at the time of school entry that were important for later success", which includes both socio-emotional and pre-academic competencies (Raver, Garner & Smith-Donald, 2007). Early research indicates that school readiness is more than being cognitively and academically prepared as children's social, emotional, and behavioural adjustment is just as important (Raver & Zigler, 1997).

Preschool children who display challenges in socio-emotional areas are more likely to experience difficulties that impacts on their ability to develop typical peer relationships within the classroom and to behave in ways that hinder their learning (Vaughn et al., 1992). For example, children may have difficulty with following instructions and working in groups (Rimm-Kaufman, Pianta & Cox, 2000). Thus, children who have more socio-emotional competence are more likely to be academically competent school. This may be due to their ability to get along with others and in turn have more successful peer and adult relationships (Thomspon & Goodman, 2009).

1.2 Rationale

At least 200 million children in developing countries are affected by nutrition and socio-economic factors that affect them from reaching their full developmental potential (Walker et al., 2007). Children in South Africa are often affected by the social and economic inequalities resulting from Apartheid which ultimately impacts on their development (Atmore, van Niekerk & Ashley-Cooper, 2012). Poverty and the impact it has on nutrition has been identified as one of the key factors affecting early childhood development (Atmore et al., 2012) which is problematic for the socio-emotional development of children since poverty is associated with lower academic performance and higher behavioural and emotional problems (Dupéré, Leventhal, Crosnoe & Dion, 2010).

International and local literature suggests that educators are noticing an increase in emotional and behavioural problems (Boyd et al., 2005; de Witt & Lessings, 2013; Marais & Meier, 2010; Rimm-Kaufman, Pianta & Cox 2000). Children who have appropriate socio-emotional development are more capable of handling complex social situations with appropriate interactional skills, participating in positive interactions with their peers and developing friendships (Buysse, Goldman, West & Hollingsworth, 2008). While difficulties in such skills are associated with displaying persistent aggression, oppositional defiant behaviours, social isolation (Campbell, 2002; Webster-Stratton & Reid, 2003), adolescent delinquency, antisocial behaviour, and high-school dropout rates (Nagin & Tremblay, 2001; LaCourse et al., 2002). Without early intervention, the troubles stemming from difficulties in socio-emotional development create a burden for society in terms of juvenile delinquency and adult crime (Boyd et al., 2005).

Globally, extensive research has been dedicated to the socio-emotional development of children with regard to play, socio-emotional programmes, school readiness and school success (Ashiabi, 2007; Fantuzzo et al., 2005; Aviles et al., 2006; Bierman et al., 2008). South African

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research has focused on socio-emotional learning programmes (Gelderbloem, 2014) and adolescent mothers impact on children's development (Mahwai, 2016). However, there is limited current published research within the South African context relating to the socio-emotional development in early childhood and its importance for school readiness, specifically from the views of preschool teachers. This study contributes to this gap in literature by addressing preschool teachers' understanding and classroom experiences of socio-emotional development. The findings of this study provide contextual insight into the understanding and experiences of preschool teachers in Cape Town, as well as the challenges they face. In addition, the findings may provide a basis for future intervention programmes to facilitate young children's socio-emotional development.

1.3 Theoretical framework

This study is informed by Albert Bandura's social learning theory, which posits that adults function as "environmental experts who model appropriate behaviours and structures the environment" in ways that encourage appropriate behaviours in children (Gallagher & Sylvester, 2009, p. 225). According to Crain (1980), in this theory children learn in social settings by imitating the behaviours they observe from others (Crain, 1980). By observing others, children learn what the likely consequences are for their behaviour (Crain, 1980). Furthermore, Grusec (1992) states that the successful imitation of a model requires the observer to pay close attention to the behaviour being modelled, which is determined by the conditions under which the behaviour is viewed as well as the power and attractiveness of the model. Once attention has been paid to modelled behaviour it has to be remembered by associating it with a mental or verbal representational system and this symbolic representation must be converted into similar appropriate actions as the originally modelled behaviour. Because performance is ruled by motivation and reinforcement, imitation of the

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model will only occur if one is to gain a reward (Grusec, 1992). For example, teachers can reward children's prosocial behaviours in the classroom that will encourage the same or similar type of behaviour for other students (Meija & Kliewer, 2006). Therefore, this framework was deemed as an appropriate lens to understand teachers understanding and classroom experiences of socio-emotional development as teachers are agents in children's socio-emotional development. This means that the way in which teachers behave, express their emotions, and interact with their learners have an influence on their socio-emotional development and in turn on their outward behaviours. Thus teachers understanding of socio-emotional development is important for the way in which they behave and interact in front of their students, because according to Bandura's social learning theory children learn by imitating the behaviours of those in their surroundings.

1.4 Research questions

The study was based on the research questions below:

- What is preschool teachers' understanding of the concept of socio-emotional development?
- What are teachers' classroom experiences in terms of the socio-emotional development of preschool learners?
- What role do teachers think socio-emotional development plays in preparing the child for school?

1.5 Aims and objectives

This study aims to explore preschool teachers' understanding and classroom experience of socio-emotional development in early childhood and the role it plays in school readiness.

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The study was informed by the following objectives:

1. To explore pre-school teachers' understanding of the concept of socio-emotional development.

2. To understand the teachers' classroom experiences in terms of the socio-emotional development of preschool learners.

3. To explore teachers' understanding of the role that socio-emotional development plays in preparing the child for school.

1.6 Significance of the study

When children have age appropriate socio-emotional development they are more likely to interact positively with peers and adults (Buysse, Goldman, West & Hollingsworth, 2008), which aids in smooth adaptation and transition to formal schooling (Denham, 2006). While difficulties in this area of development is often linked to anger, aggression, and defiant behaviours (Campbell, 2002; Webster-Stratton & Reid, 2003). By considering the importance of children's holistic development and both international and national policies emphasis on early childhood development, it is clear that a dire need exists to prevent and improve the socio-emotional difficulties of young children to ensure that they reach their maximum developmental potential (Conroy & Brown, 2004). In order to gain more insight this study sought to understand and explore what teachers know about children's development and the socio-emotional challenges they face. The findings of this study may benefit stakeholders in the field of education as well as parents who are generally primary agents in children's development.

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1.7 Chapter overview

This thesis comprises of five chapters. Each chapter builds on from the previous chapter. Chapter 1 provided an introduction for the study by highlighting the background and rationale for the study.

Chapter 2 consists of a review of the literature on early childhood development in South Africa as well as socio-emotional development in early childhood.

Chapter 3 outlines the methodological framework the study has undertaken and describes the research design, research context, sampling of participants, data collection, analysis, and the ethics considered for the study.

Chapter 4 presents the findings of the study with a comprehensive discussion.

Chapter 5 is the conclusion of the thesis along with the strengths and limitations of the study and recommendations for future studies.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Socio-emotional development in early childhood has received much attention globally in research studies. However, despite the growing body of research indicating its significance in preparing young children for formal schooling, not much attention has been paid to how socio-emotional development in understood by South African preschool teachers. This literature review examines early childhood development in the South African context, the current knowledge about socio-emotional development in early childhood, and how preschool teachers in other contexts perceive socio-emotional and its association with school readiness.

2.1 Early Childhood Development in South Africa

Early Childhood Development (ECD) is used as an umbrella term that applies to the processes by which children grow and thrive mentally, physically, emotionally, socially, spiritually, and morally from birth to at least nine years of age (Department of Education [DoE], 2001). Census 2016 records 570 371 0-4 year olds and 546 410 5-9 year olds in the Western Cape (Stats SA, 2016). South Africa's vision for ECD is to ensure the protection of children's rights by providing resources and environments to aid the development of children's full potential in all aspects of growth and development (Department of Basic Education [DoBE], 2009). However, few children realise their full potential as a result of environmental and individual factors affecting their development.

Despite a decrease in income poverty rates an estimated 5.5 million children are living below the poverty line (Hall & Sambu, 2016; Radebe, 2017). Consequently, many children experience malnutrition and approximately 25% of children under the age of 5 are reported to be stunted (Radebe, 2017). These statistics paint a bleak picture for optimal development, as roughly 80% of brain development occurs in the first three years of life which is highly dependent on adequate nutrition (WHO et al., 2018). Moreover, supportive and responsive

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caregiving is sometimes compromised in environments plagued with community and family violence and environmental toxins (such as substance abuse), which further puts children at risk for insecure attachments and behavioural problems (Republic of South Africa, 2015).

As a way to ensure the best possible start in life for children, national policies such as the National Integrated Early Childhood Development Policy (NIECDP) facilitates the provision of comprehensive ECD services for all infants and young children. The NIECDP identifies relevant role players as well as their roles and responsibilities for the provision of various ECD services (Republic of South Africa, 2015). In addition, the NIECDP emphasises the importance early learning and stimulation, and that information regarding ECD should be publicly available and accessible for all caregivers (Republic of South Africa, 2015). On a provincial level, the government acknowledges the importance of the early years in life and have implemented various interventions to facilitate ECD. One intervention by the Western Cape Government and Department of Health is the First 1000 Days Campaign. The main outcome of this initiative is to ensure optimal development and wellness for children, women, and the community at large (Western Cape Government Health, n.d.). This initiative emphasises the importance of 3 aspects: (1) adequate nutrition; (2) a good environment (loving care and a nurturing safe space free from stress and harmful substances); and (3) a stimulating environment (with mental, emotional, and physical support) in which a baby can play and learn (Western Cape Government, 2018). Information regarding this information is available online and provides caregivers with information relating to the 3 earlier mentioned aspects. Interventions such as this prepares young children for early childhood education.

2.1.1 Early childhood education in South Africa

In South Africa, early childhood education is available in ECD facilities. These facilities may be public institutions or independent institutions. Public ECD institutions are

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funded by provincial departments of education and comprise of pre-primary schools that provide ECD programmes for children from the age of 3 to 5 years (DoE, 2001). Independent institutions are mainly funded through the fees parents pay, community fundraising and/or donations of materials, with little or no financial support from the government (DoE, 2001). Furthermore, independent ECD provision includes: "the Reception Year (Grade R) at independent schools", the reception year (Grade R) attached to public schools but managed by the school governing body and operated by a private individual or the community, independent pre-primary schools that make provision for children aged 3 to 5 years, privately operated or community run crèches that provide for children from birth to 5 years, and home-based provision for children from birth to the age of 5 (DoE, 2001).

Atmore et al., (2012) state that quality teaching and learning is vital for effective early development to occur. Irrespective of the facility a child attends, a quality teacher can provide a learning environment in which optimal and holistic development can take place (Atmore et al., 2012). The entry-level qualification for ECD teachers in South Africa is the Further Education and Training Certificate: ECD Level 4. This provides practitioners with the essential skills to facilitate the holistic development of young children as well as offering quality ECD services in various settings. The Higher Certificate and National Diploma: ECD Level 5 qualification is aimed at providing experienced ECD practitioners with higher education (Atmore et al, 2012; Atmore, 2013).

Government and private ECD programmes consist of Pre-Grade R and Grade R programmes. Pre-Grade R programmes are for children between 0-4 years of age, and Grade R programmes are for 5-6 years old children (Kotzė, 2015; van Rensburg, 2015). Pre-grade R programmes are guided by the National Early Learning Development Standards (NELDS).

2.1.2 Early childhood development curriculums

In South Africa there are two main curriculums for ECD years namely the National Early Learning Development Standards (NELDS) which is used for pre grade R and the National Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) which is used for Grade R learners as well as for grades up to the final year of schooling Grade 12.

The National Early Learning Development Standards (NELDS) is a curriculum-related policy initiative focusing primarily on the early learning needs of children from birth to four years (DoBE, 2009). Not only does the NELDS provide suggestions for appropriate activities that can be used to initiate early learning development, it also encourages an "integrated approach" to include the various skills, abilities, and knowledge that children are expected and encouraged to reach in the different domains of development namely cognitive, physical, social, and emotional in a specific age range (DoBE, 2009).

According to the Department of Basic Education (2011), the National Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) aims to equip Grade R to Grade 12 learners (irrespective of their race, gender, socio-economic background, physical ability or intellectual ability) with the skills, knowledge, and values that are essential for self-fulfilment, and meaningful participation in society. Grade R lessons focus on language, mathematics, and life skills (Department of Basic Education, 2011). Since 1998, Grade R (kindergarten) has been part of the Foundation Phase (Grade R to Grade 3) education policy (Janse van Rensburg, 2015). CAPS includes that all educators should have a thorough understanding of how to recognise and address barriers to learning which includes social and emotional development. Thus, early childhood educators play an important role in the lives of young children as they not only have the task of teaching and moulding the minds of tomorrow but they also need to have a sound understanding of child development including information regarding how to address any barriers to learning within their scope of practice.

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Although progress has been made since 1994 in terms of access and quality of programmes, the ECD sector is affected by poverty, infrastructure, HIV/AIDS, teacher development and funding (Atmore, 2013). A high level of poverty exists within the South African society. In 2015, 55.5% (30.4 million) of the South African population were reportedly living in poverty, with 13.8 million people living below the food poverty line (Statistics South Africa, 2017). The World Bank (2017) reports that South Africa's economy has one of the highest rates of inequality in the world which ultimately perpetuates both inequality and exclusion. It is further stated that in 2014 the gini coefficient, which is a measure of a country's inequality, reached 0.69 based on income data (including wages, salaries, and social grants), where 0 is perfect equality and 1 is perfect inequality (World Bank, 2017). Thus, it is no surprise that Atmore (2013) notes that hunger, malnutrition, and food insecurity are major challenges facing children in a number of communities across the country. Since nutrition is related to income, the absence of adequate nutrition affects children's early development which impacts on their ability to reach their full potential, which also in turn stunts children's ability to flourish yet at the same time limits the country's potential development (Atmore, 2013).

Quality ECD programmes prepare children for adulthood by providing them with the opportunities for cognitive, physical, spiritual, social and emotional development (Atmore et al., 2012). According to section 94(2) of the Children's Act 38 of 2005, the national norms and standards for ECD programmes should: (1) provide opportunities for appropriate developmental opportunities; (2) be aimed at assisting children to reach their full potential; (3) care for children and provide them with support and security; (4) ensure the development of positive social behaviour; (5) respecting and nurturing children's "culture, spirit, dignity, individuality, language and development"; and (6) meeting the emotional, cognitive, sensory, spiritual, moral, physical, social and communication development needs of children" (Children's Act 38 of 2005, 2006, p. 152). Although the Children's Act of 2005 is all

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encompassing in terms of ECD programmes being aimed at children's holistic development, the South African Schools Act 84 of 1996 do not refer to age appropriate development as part of admission requirements. Section 5(4) of the South African Schools Act 84 of 1996 states that "a learner must be admitted to grade one if he or she turns seven in the course of that calendar year" (South African Schools Act 84 of 1996, 1998, p.2). The aforementioned legislation does not mention any level of development as part of admission criteria. Therefore, indicating that children may start school even if they do not have age-appropriate development in key areas of development such as cognitive, physical, social and emotional development. However, it is essential that children acquire age appropriate milestones for smooth transitioning into formal schooling, especially with regard to socio-emotional development.

2.2 Socio-emotional development in the preschool years

The preschool years are critical for developing a solid foundation for "thinking, behaving, and emotional well-being" (Bakken, Brown & Downing, 2017, p. 255). Socio-emotional development in the preschool years includes acquiring a set of skills that will aid children in their transition to the first grade.

Researchers (Hemmeter, Santos & Ostrosky, 2008) have identified the skills that children need to develop during preschool that will aid in their success as they move into school. These skills include: the ability to recognise and express emotions in appropriate ways; establish and maintain positive relationships with adults and peers; solve social problems; manage difficult emotions; persevere through challenging tasks; participate in group activities; follow instructions (Hemmeter et al., 2008); be able to take turns and share with others (Lin, Lawrence & Gorrell, 2003); be compliant with rules and have sustained behavioural inhibition (Campbell & von Stauffenberg, 2008). An important milestone that develops during the age of 3 to 5 is self-awareness which is an increased ability to understand others (Kostelnik, Whiren,

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Soderman, & Gregory, 2009). Children also develop an increased affective perspective taking, which entails the ability to understand and be empathic towards others (Colwell & Hart, 2006).

It is important to state that many of these skills are dependent on emotion regulation, which is the child's ability to adjust to the experience and expression of feelings in a specific context (Cole, Michel & Teti, 1994). Thus, the way in which children experience, regulate, and express their emotions is often contingent on the way in which they were socialised, their interactions with their parents and/or caregivers, and their observations of how adults in their immediate environment respond to people and situations (Rochat, Mitchell & Richter, 2008). That said, it becomes clear as to why Arslan, Durmuşoğlu-Saltali & Yilmaz (2011) notes that emotional development may be thought of as forming the basis of social development, seeing that early parent and caregiver-child relationships sets the foundation for the development of emotional skills and future social relationships (Saarni, 2011). In addition to parent and caregiver relationships, preschool teachers also play an important role in young children's socio-emotional development.

2. 3 Teachers' role in socio-emotional development and school readiness

According to Eisenberg et al. (1998, p. 6), non-parental adults also play an important role in "teaching children about emotion, its causes and consequences, and its expression and regulation". When young children enter preschool, their teachers become their socialising agents in the context of the classroom. Apart from teaching children academic related content, teachers also assist children's socio-emotional development in the sense that they can create an environment in which holistic development occurs. Indeed, prior research provides evidence for the importance of teachers creating a positive learning environment with regard to the emotional climate of the classroom. For example, Humphries, Strickland and Keenan (2014) investigated the social and emotional competence of African American preschool children and the role teachers (and mothers) play in supporting socio-emotional competence. The sample

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consisted of 97 preschool children aged 3-5 years as well (as their biological mothers). Findings reveal that children were observed to engage in more socially competent behaviours when teachers created a positive emotional climate by labelling and being responsive to children's positive emotions. They concluded that when children feel supported in a classroom environment that they participate in lessons more easily (Humphries et al., 2014).

Young children develop and learn through an array of interactions during their school day, and their competencies are shaped by the nature and quality of these interactions (Booren, Downer & Vitiello, 2012). The relationship between teachers and children has the ability to exert a positive or negative influence on children's ability to succeed in the school environment (Pianta & Stuhlman, 2004). However, the development of this relationship is not easy as it is influenced by both the child and teacher's characteristics (such as temperament, attachment styles, as well as emotion regulation skills) and classroom characteristics (such as classroom instructional practices and the climate in the classroom) (Graziano, Reavis, Keane & Calkin, 2007; Mantzicopoulos, 2005; Veríssimo et al., 2017). In South African classrooms, learner to teacher ratios are often problematic as many classrooms are overcrowded (Marias, 2016). Within Cape Town schools, learner to teacher ratios have increased from 30.3 in 2014 to 40.1 in 2016 (Western Cape Government, 2018). This poses as a risk factor for the development of the teacher-child relationship especially in government schools in the South African context.

Broekhuizen, Slot, van Aken and Dubas (2017) argues that the preschool environment allows children to interact with unfamiliar adults and peers. Therefore, teachers are in the position to utilise this opportunity to strengthen children's socio-emotional skills. Teachers can assist children to understand and interpret their feelings (Thompson & Happold, 2002), encourage positive peer interactions (Broekhuizen et al., 2017), and use high levels of praise to positively facilitate the development of socio-emotional skills in young children (Webster-Stratton, Reid & Stoolmiller, 2008). This is proven in a randomised trial by Webster et al.

(2008) who evaluated a teacher classroom management and child social and emotional curriculum. The curriculum encouraged parent involvement in the home environment and the use of positive classroom management skills which centred on building social competence and emotional self-regulation skills. The sample consisted of 1768 kindergarten and Grade learners and 153 teachers. The results revealed that the teachers who were placed in the intervention group used more positive classroom management strategies which resulted in learners showing more social competence and emotional self-regulation, as well as displaying less conduct problems than the students in the control group. When teachers use positive teaching strategies and work towards establishing a good relationship with their learners, the teacher-child relationship can be seen as a protective factor for children's social development and academic development (Baker, 2006). Positive teacher-child relationships allow children to develop and utilise effective social skills to find their way in various situations (La Paro, Pianta and Stuhlman, 2004).

Similarly, Williford, Whittaker, Vitiello and Downer (2013) observed how 341 urban preschool children engaged with their teachers, peers, and learning activities in the classroom in the United States. They considered teachers' reports on children's emotion regulation and task orientation in their analysis. They found that the expression of positive emotions and a high emotional connection between teachers and children was associated with an increase in compliance and positive engagement in classroom activities and tasks, which in turn resulted in an improvement in children's emotion regulation skills (Williford et al., 2013). These findings are similar to prior research by Pianta and Stuhlma (2004) who examined the association between closeness and conflict in teacher-child relationships and children's social and academic skills in the first grade. The sample consisted of 490 children and their teachers who were a small subset of the National Institute of Child Health and the Human Development's Study on Early Child Care. With regard to social competence, the findings

indicated that higher conflict in the teacher-child relationship was associated with lower social competence in children. In addition, when teachers reported more closeness in a relationship with a child, they also reported higher levels of social competence in that child (Pianta & Stuhlman, 2004).

Considering the above studies together, it is not surprising that the quality of the teacher-child relationship has been found to play a mediating role in children's risk of school failure (Baker, 2006). Moreover, the quality of the teacher-child relationship in preschool has been found to predict the type of relationship that children will develop with the teacher and peers as they progress through the school years (Birch & Ladd, 1997). This indicates that early teacher-child relationships can provide an indication of how the child's future relationships with their teachers will be. The role of teachers in children socio-emotional development cannot be denied. It is evident that children's socio-emotional competence influences not only their ability to learn but also their readiness to learn.

2.3 Socio-emotional development and school readiness

In many contexts around the world, emphasis is placed on children being ready for school as they need to be able to adapt to the classroom environment and engage in classroom activities. An interesting and all-encompassing definition of school readiness is by UNICEF (2012, p. 3) who defines school readiness by "three interlinked dimensions namely 'ready children', 'ready schools', and 'ready families'". The first dimension 'ready children' considers a child's learning and development, that is "what the child should know and be able to do" to ensure that the transition to a primary school environment is successful. The second dimension 'ready schools' is centred on the school environment, more specifically practices that encourages learning for all children, adopting inclusive educational approaches, that foster and support a smooth transition for children to not only primary school but beyond. Ready schools allow sufficient time for learning, supplies adequate learning materials, and has effective

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teaching practices as well as competent teachers. The third dimension 'ready families' focuses on parent and caregiver attitudes and involvement in the child's early learning, development, and transition to school (UNICEF, 2012, p 4). UNICEF's definition of school readiness encapsulates all aspects related to a child's school readiness; which is supported by a mass of research that highlights the importance of holistic development- cognitive, emotional, physical, and social development (e.g. Blair, 2002; Raver, 2002; Van Zyl, 2011; Webster-Stratton & Reid, 2004). In addition, school readiness is also influenced by many factors such as the family environment (e.g. divorced family), the communication between the teacher and child (Pekdoğan & Akgül, 2017), developmental delays, difficult temperament and personality, medical problems, as well as characteristics of the preschool classroom such as large class numbers (Peth-Pierce, 2000).

A study done by Piotrkowski, Botsko and Matthews (2000), in one mostly Hispanic and Black high-need urban school district in New York State, which had high numbers of children who live in poverty, high rates of school drop-out, grade retention, and special education placement. They examined 355 parents', 46 preschool teachers, and 57 kindergarten teachers' beliefs about children's school readiness via the survey of Community Attitude on Readiness for Entering School (CARES). The CARES measure was specifically developed for the study and underwent factor analysis as well as back translation for the Spanish version. They found that kindergarten teachers saw motor skills (eg. writing, colouring, and cutting) as less important than preschool teachers and parents. However, parents and teachers agreed that health and social competencies such as emotional maturity (self-control, turn taking, and independence), communicating feelings and needs, and playing well with other children as undeniably necessary for school readiness (Piotrkowski et al., 2000). Moreover, parents placed more emphasis on children knowing basic knowledge (such as colours and the alphabet) and advanced knowledge (eg. knowing address or days of the week in the correct order) than

teachers did. Despite teachers placing less importance on knowledge than parents, kindergarten teachers rated basic knowledge as less important than preschool teachers, while preschool teachers rated advanced knowledge as more important, kindergarten teachers rated basic knowledge as more important (Piotrkowski et al., 2000). Although this study was conducted in a different context to South Africa, the conditions in which the learners come from can be viewed as similar, since poverty in any context can affect the socio-emotional development of children.

Another similar study by Lin, Lawrence and Goreel (2002) examined 3305 kindergarten teachers' perceptions of children's school readiness. Teachers' perceptions were gathered from self-administered questionnaires which collected in the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study- Kindergarten cohort in the 1998-1999 school year. The teachers had different training experiences and were from different school contexts (public and private schools) within the United States. Although there was a small percentage of male teachers (2%) in the sample, there was a stronger emphasis on kindergarten teachers preparing children to meet the social demands of schooling than there was on academic skills development. Teachers' main concerns regarding school readiness were without a doubt related to children's social behaviours in school such as following directions, turn taking and sharing, communicating their thoughts and wants, and not disrupting class. These social behaviours in comparison to academic items (such as counting, knowing the alphabet, naming colours and shapes, and using brushes and pencils) were perceived to be more essential by teachers (Lin et al., 2003).

More recently, Pekdoğan and Akgül (2017) studied 204 preschool teachers' perspectives of children's school readiness, by means of the School Readiness Form, the School Readiness Checklist for children aged 5-6, as well as qualitative interviews. Although it is unclear as to what context the study was conducted in, the findings revealed that teachers

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emphasised that children should have age appropriate development in motor skills, self-care, socio-emotional development, and in both the language and cognitive domains in order to be school ready (Pekdoğan & Akgül, 2017).

As evident in the research mentioned above, school readiness is more than a child's ability to pay attention, sit still, and write (Leseman, 2012). School readiness means that children have knowledge of letters, counting skills, phonological awareness, curiosity to learn and explore, are able to express their needs and wants, and can control their emotions (Leseman, 2012). Indeed, the studies discussed above, which were conducted in different contexts demonstrates that socio-emotional development is an essential prerequisite for school readiness and aids in school adaptation and ultimately classroom behaviour.

2.5 Socio-emotional development and classroom behaviour

The behaviour that a child displays in the classroom is influenced by different factors. For example, a child's behaviour may be an imitation of a family member's as a result of watching and learning from the behaviour of others, or simply as a result of individual temperament (Dowling, 2005). However, it is understood that socio-emotional development also influences young children's behaviour (Maguire, Niens, McCann & Connolly, 2016). This may be owing to the notion that emotional regulation underlies all social interactions and behaviours, by guiding thinking and motivating actions (Lopes et al., 2011).

To illustrate how socio-emotional emotional competence is linked to children's behaviour, Fantuzzo, Bulotsky-Sheaer, Fusco and McWayne (2005) investigated the relationship between several dimensions of behavioural adjustment in the classroom and noticeable social-emotional competencies in a sample of 210 preschool children. Behavioural adjustment problems in the classroom were assessed by the Adjustment Scales for Preschool Intervention across many routine situations in the classroom. They found that children who exhibited inattentive and oppositional behaviour displayed higher levels of unpredictable and

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negative emotions in the classroom, while socially withdrawn behaviour in children were associated with less adaptive self-regulation (or emotional regulation) skills and engagement with peers. On a very similar note, research has found that preschool children who have highly regulated behaviour are better able to accept instructional feedback from teachers and peers, and display lower levels of aggressive behaviour and higher levels of attention and persistence to collaborative learning activities with teachers (Fantuzzo, Bulotsky-Shearer, McDermott, McWayne & Frye, 2007). Considering that these studies were conducted in contexts in which the participants (in the Head Start programme) came from disadvantaged backgrounds, the findings indicates that the influence of poverty on children's socio-emotional development as well as their classroom experiences cannot be taken lightly (Bobbit & Gershoff, 2016). Most researchers seem to agree that a lack of social skills is accompanied by more behavioural problems (Vahedi, Farrokhi & Farajian, 2012).

In addition, gender has also been under investigation with regard to behaviour and socio-emotional development. Some research has found that preschool boys on average are rated higher on behavioural problems, lower on social competence, and hyperactivity, whereas girls have been found to engage in more prosocial behaviours (Dierner & Kim, 2004; Maguire, Niens, McCann & Connolly, 2016; Vahedi et al., 2012). According to Vahedi et al. (2012) the reason for the differences in behaviours may be due to boys being more physically active, engage in more risk-taking behaviour and show more aggression than girls.

In summary, early childhood development in South Africa is still affected by the inequalities of the past. However, national policies which are informed by international research are working toward a better future for the children of the country. The relationship between preschool teachers and children plays a role in children's socio-emotional development and successful transition to formal schooling. Lastly, it has been thoroughly demonstrated in the literature of the importance of socio-emotional skills for academic success.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

This study utilised a qualitative methodological framework as it aimed to explore the participants' subjective experience and in-depth account as to how they understand and experience socio-emotional development. A qualitative methodology was deemed appropriate for the study as it is concerned with "developing an understanding of the meaning and experience" of individuals' social worlds and lives (Fossey, Harvey, McDermott & Davidson, 2002, p. 717). Contributing to the selection of a qualitative methodology was the fact that the study's objective was to explore and obtain a deep understanding of a phenomena (Greenhalg & Taylor, 1997) from the participants' viewpoints.

3.1 Research design

This study took on an exploratory research design in exploring teachers' understanding of socio-emotional development in early childhood and its importance for school readiness. Many studies concerning the socio-emotional development in early childhood has been quantitative in nature (eg. Denham et al., 2003; Fantuzzo et al, 2005; Hemmetter et al., 2008). However, an exploratory design was preferred for this study as it concerned exploring and answering questions about the complex nature of phenomena, where relatively little scientific knowledge exists regarding the topic. In addition, the aim of the study was to describe and understand phenomena from the participants' perspective (Leedy & Omrod, 2005; Given, 2008).

3.2 Research setting

The study took place in the city of Cape Town which has an estimated population of 3.81 million (World Population Review, 2018). More specifically, two low-income areas within the city are of particular interest to the study. One area is situated approximately 23km from the city, while the other is approximately 28km from the city. Low-income communities in Cape Town (especially on the Cape Flats) are known to be confronted by many challenges.

These include poverty, high rates of unemployment, poor infrastructure, gangsterism and crime, substance abuse, and low levels of skills and education which is often related to the inequalities stemming from the country's socio-political past (Savahl, 2010). Exposure to these contextual issues can have negative consequences on children's socio-emotional development which hinder their development.

3.3 Participants and sampling

This study recruited 12 preschool teachers from both community-based preschools registered with the Department of Social Development (DosD) and government school-based preschools providing a Grade R programme registered with the Western Cape Education Department (WCED). According to Dworkin (2012) anywhere from 5 to 50 participants is an adequate sample size for in-depth qualitative interviews. This decision was based on factors such as "the quality of data, the scope of the study, the nature of the topic, the amount of useful information obtained from each participant, and the qualitative method, study design used" (Morse, 2000, p.1), as well as reaching the point of saturation (Saunders et al., 2018). A small sample size is often used in qualitative inquiry because it aims for depth of information (Wilmot, 2008). The flexibility of semi-structured interviews allowed for the discovery or elaboration of information that was of importance to participants (Gill, Steward, Treasure & Chadwick, 2008). Thus, the recruitment of 12 participants in this study was appropriate as the interviews yielded rich, in-depth data from the participants.

Key challenges faced by South Africa's ECD sector is related to poverty, poor infrastructure as well as teacher development (Atmore, 2012). Therefore, community-based preschools and government school-based preschools was selected in low-income communities in Cape Town. Community-based preschools were selected based on the limited resources in the surrounding community and whether the community was previously disadvantaged in the Apartheid era. Four community-based preschools in two low-income areas were approached

to participate in this study, but only 2 agreed to participate. Furthermore, the Department of Education (DoE) divides schools into Quintiles (1-5), where Quintile 1 is the group of schools in the province that caters for the poorest 20% of learners, quintile 2 for the next poorest 20% and so forth, while Quintile 5 caters for the least poor 20% of learners (DoE, 2004). Quintiles 1-3 pay no school fees, and Quintiles 4-5 are fee paying schools. Low-income schools were chosen based on whether they are categorised as Quintiles 1-5 and whether its surrounding community has limited resources and was previously disadvantaged in the Apartheid era. Out of the six primary schools which were approached in three low-income areas, only 3 schools (all Quintile 5) in two low-income areas agreed to participate in the study. The schools who did not participate in the study either did not express an interest in participating or communicated that they have already participated in other research studies for the year.

Participants were purposively selected as they were selected based on specific criteria (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003). The inclusion criteria for participation for this study was two-fold: (1) at the time of the study, participants had to have been a preschool teacher for at least two years; and (2) the participant is currently a preschool teacher teaching pre-schoolers. Having this experience and background allowed the participants to share their experiences of socio-emotional development in the classroom setting as well as what it means for school readiness. Purposive sampling is employed when the researcher wants to select a sample that represents a broad group of cases as closely as possible (Teddlie & Yu, 2007) and choosing participants who have experience and knowledge of the research topic (Tongco, 2007).

Table 1

Profile of Participants

Participant	Age	Gender	Qualifications	Years of teaching experience
1_Emily	31	Female	Level 5	8
2_Kim	25	Female	Level 5	7
3_Leah	36	Female	Level 5	7
4_Amy	46	Female	Level 5	28
5_Mia	24	Female	Level 4	2
6_Andy	24	Female	In progress	8
7_Lily	55	Female	Preschool certificate	30
8_Rina	26	Female	Level 5, BEd in progress	7
9_Abby	51	Female	3 years-	27
10_Joy	35	Female	Level N6 Diploma	15
11_Liz	24	Female	Level 5/N4	5
12_Tia	26	Female	National Diploma N6	2

Table 1 provides the demographic information of the participants. The study included 12 female participants, between the ages of 24 and 55, who were interviewed via semi-structured interviews. Participants had between 2 and 30 years of teaching experience. Almost

all of the participants had qualifications for teaching early childhood education. All participants' names were changed into pseudonyms to ensure participants anonymity.

3.4 Data collection and procedure

Data were collected by means of in-depth semi-structured interviews. Interviews are one of the most commonly used methods of data collection in qualitative research (Jamshed, 2014) as it allows for probing interviewees to obtain rich data (Gray, 2004). Semi-structured interviews are used to aid a focused exploration of a specific topic by using an interview guide which contains a list of open-ended questions and prompts designed to guide the interview in a focused, yet flexible and conversational manner (Fossey et al., 2002; Jamshed, 2014). The advantage of semi-structured interviews is that interviewees may raise aspects not necessarily anticipated by the researcher (Hugh-Jones, 2010). Thus, this type of interview is favoured by many researchers as it provides depth of information and the researcher can probe to understand the subjective perspectives of the participants (Hardon, Hodgkin & Fresle, 2004).

The interview guide consisted of two sections (Appendix A). Section A contained demographic information related to participants' age, gender, qualifications, and years of teaching experience. The questions that guided the interview in Section B were open ended, constructed according to the structure of the research objectives, and were guided by the literature and theory as well as the broader research questions. Questions in Section B of the interview guide pertained to exploring the following: participants' understanding of the concept of SED; challenges participants face in terms of SED in the classroom, the kind of activities that are used to facilitate SED, how difficulties related to SED are addressed, as well as the kinds of skills that teachers require in enhancing children's SED; and participants' understanding of the role that SED plays in preparing the child for school by enquiring what social and emotional skills are essential when children start school.

Prior to data collection, the interview schedule was pre-tested with an educator who shared similar characteristics to the sample to ensure that the questions were understandable and would extract information that would be able to answer the research question. Thus, at the same time increasing the validity of the instrument. The pre-test of the instrument revealed that the questions were adequately understood and could yield answers to the interview questions.

Once ethics clearance was granted from the University of the Western Cape's Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (Ethics Reference number: HS17/5/16), principals of the identified schools were contacted via telephone calls to set up a meeting to discuss the teachers' participation in the study. At the meetings, principals were given a letter (Appendix B) to request permission to conduct the study which included the objectives of the study as well as the required participation from educators at their schools. Some principals requested the letter via e-mail prior to the meeting. Thereafter, the Western Cape Education Department (WCED) was approached for permission to conduct research at the identified schools who were willing to participate in the study. Upon ethics clearance and approval from the WCED (Appendix C), prospective participants were identified, and given the information sheets (Appendix D) to peruse. Once the participants indicated that they understood the requirements of the study and their rights as participants, they were then asked to sign the consent forms (Appendix E). The interviews were estimated to be an hour and were scheduled for after the school day at a time that was convenient for the participants.

The interviews were conducted in the third term of the school year. Prior to the commencement of all the interviews the researcher ensured that she was completely familiarised with the interview guide. The interviews were conducted in English, took place in the teachers' classrooms at the government primary schools and in secluded rooms at community-based preschools. Prior to the start of the interviews, participants were briefed about the nature of the study, their contribution, that their identities would be protected with

the use of pseudonyms, as well as their right to stop participating at any time without consequences. They were also asked before the interview commenced if they had any questions and any concerns that could be addressed by the researcher. One or two participants shared that they felt anxious and shared that they felt unsure they would be able to answer the questions adequately. The researcher tried to put the participants at ease by emphasising that the researcher was not interested in textbook answers, but was only interested in their understanding and experiences of socio-emotional development in their classrooms. Once these participants felt at ease the interview proceeded. The participants were previously informed that the researcher would like to audio-record the interview, however prior to the commencement of the interview, the researcher requested permission from participants to audio-record the interviews as this would assist the researcher in the process of data analysis. Throughout the interviews, the mood of the participants was positive as they were willing to share their experiences. The researcher at all times remained open-minded and aware of the participants' views expressed. Throughout the 12 interviews, the researcher remained mindful and respectful of the views expressed by the participants. In some instances, the researcher rephrased what the participants shared to ensure that the participant was understood correctly. After all the questions in the interview guide were covered, the researcher thanked the participant for their time and asked whether they would like to add anything or if they had any questions. Any questions or comments that were conveyed by the participants were well received by the researcher and were responded to appropriately. This was followed by a short debriefing session with participants. During this time, participants were asked how they experienced the interview and were any of the questions too sensitive to answer, Lastly, all interviews were transcribed verbatim.

3.5 Data Analysis

The transcribed data were analysed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six phases of thematic analysis, which is an extensively used qualitative analytic method within psychology (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis is "a method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p 79). Themes contain information in the data that is important for the research question and "that represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 9). Thus, themes that emerged in this study are vital for answering the research question. The data were analysed according to the following phases. It should be noted that the process was not linear as the researcher went back and forth between different phases while trying to make sense of the data.

Phase 1: Immersing yourself within your data

Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 16) suggest that it is of utmost importance that one is immersed in the data to ensure that the researcher is "familiar with the depth and breadth of the data". Researchers are advised to read through the whole data set at least once before they begin to analyse the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thus, the researcher immersed herself in the data by repeatedly reading the interview transcripts in order to completely familiarise herself with the data. Thus, the 12 transcripts were first read without any coding taking place in order to get an idea of what the data set entails. In addition, after the first read through of the data set, the researcher made notes which was to assist her in next phase of analysis which is generating initial codes.

Phase 2: Generating initial codes

A code identifies a feature of the data that appears interesting to the researcher (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Boyatzis (1998, p. 63) referred to a code as "the most basic segment, or element, of the raw data or information that can be assessed in a meaningful way regarding the

phenomenon" (as cited in Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 18). This phase started when the researcher read and familiarised herself with the data and created an initial list of ideas about what is in the data and what appears interesting in it (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This process permitted the researcher to hone in on certain characteristics of the data (Nowell, Morris, White & Moules, 2017). The researcher manually coded the data by highlighting texts to indicate potential patterns (Clarke & Braun, 2017).

Phase 3: Searching for themes

Searching for themes began when all the data were initially coded and included in a list of codes that were identified across the data set (Braun & Clarke, 2006). According to Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 10), a theme encapsulates something important about the data with regards to the research question and "represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set". Themes were derived inductively as the identified themes were strongly linked to the data and was therefore not predetermined by the researcher as it is done in a deductive approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Furthermore, themes were identified on a semantic level as themes were identified on the surface meanings of the data as the researcher was not interested in beyond what the participants have said such as underlying ideas and assumptions (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The codes identified by the researcher were combined to form overarching potential themes by combining relevant coded data extracts within the identified themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The researcher went about this process by naming codes and briefly describing what each code entails. Thereafter, some of the different codes were combined to form one overarching theme by considering their descriptions and whether there was a relationship between codes. At this point, the researcher gave overarching themes preliminary names.

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Phase 4: Reviewing themes

Phase 4 entails the refinement of the themes identified in the previous phase of analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Braun and Clarke (2006) advises that during this phase, the researcher should determine whether themes cohere together meaningfully/form a unified whole meaningfully and that there are clear and identifiable distinctions between themes. Part of this process included reviewing all extracts for each theme to determine whether they appear to form a coherent pattern. Thereafter, the validity of individual themes in relation to the data set was considered and whether the themes reflect the meanings that are evident in the data set as a whole (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This was accomplished by re-reading the entire data set to determine whether the themes are meaningful in relation to the data set and to code any additional data within themes that was missed in the earlier coding stages (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Once this phase was completed the researcher had an idea of what the different themes were, how they piece together, as well as the overall story they convey about the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Phase 5: Defining and naming themes

This phase started once the researcher had a satisfactory thematic map of the data set. Before starting this phase, the researcher revisited the definition of a theme as defined by Braun and Clarke (2006) to ensure that each theme contained important information that would answer the research questions. During this phase the researcher identified the essence of what each theme means as well as determining every aspect of what each theme captures (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Part of the analysis in this phase involved the researcher identifying whether or not themes contained any sub-themes (themes within themes). The identified sub-themes gave structure to the larger and more complexed themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This phase ended when the researcher was able to define what the themes were and generated the names of the themes that will be used in the final write-up and report.

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Phase 6: Producing the report

This phase began once the researcher had fully understood the themes, and involved the final write-up. Braun and Clarke (2006) note that the major task of this phase is to tell the complicated story of the data in a way which assures the reader of the quality and soundness of the researcher's analysis. The analysis provides a concise, coherent, logical, non-repetitive, and interesting account of the story the data tell, not only within themes but across themes. The presented results (in the following chapter) provides sufficient evidence of the themes within the data as evidenced by the provision of ample data extracts to demonstrate the prevalence of themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

3.6 Trustworthiness

The four criteria (credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability) identified by Guba (1981) was considered in the pursuit of a trustworthy study.

Credibility refers to the assurance that the study measures what it is intended to measure (Shenton, 2004). This was ensured by frequent debriefing with the supervisor, examining previous research findings to evaluate the degree to which the results are congruent with previous studies, iterative questioning during the interviews (Shenton, 2004) and peer debriefing (Marshall & Rossman, 2011).

Transferability refers to the transfer of findings to other settings or groups (Harrison, MacGibbon & Morton, 2003), which was ensured by providing information about the researcher as an instrument, the research context, procedures, and participants (Morrow, 2005), as well as the use of purposive sampling (Cresswell, 2007).

Dependability refers to if the study is repeated then similar results should be obtained (Shenton, 2004). This was ensured by keeping an audit trail (a detailed account of research activities and processes) and the examination of analytic memos by the supervisor (Morrow,

2005). Confirmability refers to objectivity of the study, which was achieved through an audit trail and the management of subjectivity (Morrow, 2005).

3.7 Reflexivity

Reflexivity is a method in qualitative research where researchers can validate their research practices (Pillow, 2003), which is vital to the integrity of qualitative research. It is seen as an essential process whereby researchers continuously reflect on how their own values, perspectives, and actions have an influence on the research setting and can affect both data collection and data analysis (Gerrish & Lacey, 2006). Journaling and recording one's feelings, thoughts and activities linked to the process aids in developing self-awareness and turning back on one's initial biases (McGhee, Marland & Atkinson, 2007). For this study, the researcher was constantly aware of how she was experienced by the participants and kindly requested feedback from the participants at the end of the interviews to determine whether the researcher appeared open and trustworthy to the participants, as well as whether the participants found it easy to share their experiences with the researcher. The researcher reflected on any feedback provided by the participants. To maintain reflexivity, the researcher diarised her thoughts and experiences related to the research process, which helped the researcher to engage in self-reflection and to regain perspective when it was needed.

3.8 Ethics

The ethics considered for this study are those stipulated by the University of the Western Cape. Ethics clearance was obtained from the Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee and the Western Cape Education Department. The principals of both the community-based preschools and government school-based preschools were contacted to request for permission to conduct the interviews at the schools. Once ethics clearance was obtained and access to the participants was granted, the participants were advised on the nature of the study including its aims and that their participation in the study is

completely voluntary. The researcher emphasised that the participants they can withdraw from the study at any time without consequences, should they desire to do so. Participants were ensured that their contribution to the study will not be linked to their identity in any way as pseudonyms was used to replace their real names. In addition, participants' contribution to the study was kept confidential, as transcription files and analysis documents was password protected with only the researcher and supervisor knowing the password. All information shared by participants was held confidential as no information linking to participants' identities was disclosed to anyone outside of this study. Thus, top priority was given to maintaining the anonymity and confidentiality of the participants in this study. Consent forms, audio-files, transcripts and all other documentation relating to this study was stored in a locked cupboard at all times with only the researcher and her supervisor having access to it. After 5 years, all data will be disposed of in a manner that it cannot be retrieved. Interview transcripts will be shredded and data files will be permanently deleted from the researcher's personal computer.

This chapter provided a detailed description of the research process undertaken by the researcher by providing sufficient information relating to the choice of methodological approach, specific research methods, the research context and participants, as well as how the researcher maintained the reliability and validity of the study, and lastly how the researcher upheld ethical considerations throughout the research process. The following chapter hones in on the results of the study by providing a detailed discussion of the themes that emerged within the data, followed by a discussion section which covers the main findings of the study in relation to previous research findings.

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CHAPTER 4: PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to explore preschool teachers' understanding of socio-emotional development in early childhood and the role it plays in school readiness. The following objectives informed the study: (a) to explore pre-school teachers' understanding of the concept of socio-emotional development; (b) to understand the teachers' classroom experiences in terms of the socio-emotional development of preschool learners; and (c) to explore teachers' understanding of the role that socio-emotional development plays in preparing the child for school.

Themes

Table 2

Overview of themes

Theme	Sub-themes
Understanding socio-emotional development	Home environment Interpersonal skills
Teacher-child relationship	Teacher qualities Building trust Role model
Classroom experiences of socio-emotional development	Fighting Following instructions Emotional immaturity Encouraging prosocial behaviour
Activities to facilitate socio-emotional development	Fantasy play Morning ring
Importance of socio-emotional development for school readiness	School readiness Social and emotional skills for school readiness

4.1 Theme 1: Understanding socio-emotional development

In exploring teachers' understanding of socio-emotional development, participants were asked what their understanding of socio-emotional development was. Teachers' understanding of what SED entails consisted of various interpersonal skills. Furthermore, teachers also recognized the important role that parents play in their children's socio-emotional development within the home environment as well as how home circumstances, specifically

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the parent-child interactions and the relationship between parents may impact on children's socio-emotional development and well-being.

4.1.1 Interpersonal skills

Interpersonal skills aids one in having successful relationships. This sub-theme highlights what teachers thought socio-emotional development entails. Teachers strongly linked interpersonal skills such as children being able to communicate as being part of SED. Bringing this point together was Rina who clearly stated "*To me its social, they should be able to communicate, problem solving, and um being able to interact with other children*". Teachers also noted that in addition to children being able to communicate they should also be able to express themselves.

Moreover, Abby shared that emotional maturity also forms part of SED as she stated that SED is "*how the child expresses him or her socially with the rest of the peers. Can they share? Are they at that mature emotional level where they don't mind sharing or are they still selfish?*". This response indicates that teachers view a child who is able to share as emotionally mature.

Furthermore, many teachers associated listening skills with SED. This is best illustrated by Emily as she made the following example "*if Johnny is gonna come to school is he going to speak to his classmates, is he going to interact with what I asked him as a teacher to do? If I'm going to say "come we jump together" is he going to jump together?*". This simple example shows that teachers expect that pre-schoolers should be emotionally mature enough to able to listen and understand instructions that are given to them in the classroom but also able to follow through.

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4.1.2 Socialisation within the home environment

The home environment in which one is raised is able to shape individuals. This sub-theme captures the importance of the home and social environment and its influence on children's socio-emotional development.

Many teachers were of the opinion that parenting practices including the way in which parents communicate with their children contributes to the child's SED. Emily summed up this consensus as she said that socio-emotional development has to do with "… *How the child has been raised at home and that is how the child is going to socialize within their classroom and with their classmates. So if a child is not raised properly with speaking and playing and um parents always being there and all those things, then clearly when the child comes to school then the child is also going to come with that attitude to school because then he won't speak to his classmates or he won't speak to the teacher because he don't know how to answer or communicate".* Emily suggests that when children come to school, teachers get an idea of how children were socialised in their home environment just by observing their way of interacting with others and the confidence that children show. Thus, socialisation has an influence of children's SED.

Emphasising this point was Lily who gave a simple example of how positive interactions between a parent and child has a positive effect on children's SED as she says "*You get children that's social that interacts that want to talk… their parents speak to them: their parents: "how was your day at school today my boy? um what did you do at school? tell mommy, did you have a good day?", and how do you think their emotion is going to be? A good emotion. "ag mommy I had a lovely day" so you get that loving emotion. Then you get parents that disconnect with their children, they won't ask their children how was your day? Lovingly take them "ag my baby did you have a lovely day?". No when they come home they must go play and there's no asking them."* Lily's illustration of how a child's relationship with their

parent(s) can either positively or negatively affect children's emotional growth shows the way in which parents interact with their children influences the child's SED. In essence, Lily brings across the point that emotional availability from parents can either hinder or support young children's socio-emotional development.

Moreover, teachers also note that interactions and the relationship between parents within the home environment has an effect on the SED of children. This is echoed in Andy's statement as she reported that "*our children, when they come to school in the morning one of them will say my father did this to my mother… You can see when they're playing in the fantasy area the emotions are coming out and when they socialize with the peers in the class they will say whatever is happening at home.*", thus indicating that even though children are witnesses to their parents' relationship, the emotional ambiance in the home environment filters over into the classroom affecting children's emotional state and the manner in which they interact with their peers in the classroom environment.

It is evident that teachers understanding of SED is predominantly based on the interpersonal skills that preschool children ought to have. In addition, although teachers highlighted that the home environment is a major influence on children's socio-emotional development, none of the educators thought to include that socio-emotional development could also be influenced by genetics.

4.2 Theme 2: Teacher-child relationship

The relationship between teachers and learners is important, especially since learners spend a significant portion of their day in the presence of their teachers. This theme considers the qualities and/or skills that teachers view as being important and necessary in assisting children's SED. Teachers also emphasise that learners' development can only occur in an environment that is warm and conducive for learning. Lastly, teachers acknowledge that they

are in the position to influence their learners' behaviours as some emphasise being a role model for their learners and the importance of modelling appropriate behaviour.

4.2.1 Teacher qualities

Teachers, just as any other working professional, have certain qualities that allow them to excel in their work.

The data indicated that teachers specified certain skills that they believed are vital for teachers to have when assisting children's SED. Lily specifically mentioned numerous skills and qualities that teachers need as she stated *"I think you must have love, patience, you must have that empathy, sympathy. Um you must have a lot: you must have like a good listening ear, listening skills, you must um I always pray in the morning "give me patience, guidance, self-control" um you know all those loving caring- and you must also know your um child and how to like- this child is like this how to handle him*". Although Lily highlighted important qualities that teachers should have, teachers should also know their learners and find ways to interact effectively with them.

While Lily emphasised emotional qualities, other teachers such as Emily stressed that teachers require a physical skillset as well as resources that facilitates SED as she states "*the skills that teachers need, they must have physical skills, action skills, they must have um I now don't know more action so that they could- they always say children learn through play. So have activities and things- resources- that would attract them and then you take it from there*." Emily places attention on teachers having resources at their disposal which can be used in creative ways that they think would benefit the learning and development process.

In contrast to the 11 other teachers Joy was the only educator that mentioned the quality of respect as she said that the skills that teachers need when assisting children's SED is "*patience, respect, respect goes both ways – not just a child towards a teacher but also a*

teacher towards a child." Joy unlike the other teachers brought across the importance of teachers respecting their learners and not only learners respecting their teachers.

4.2.2 Building trust

Trust is important in any relationship. This is especially true for teacher-child relationships in early childhood as teachers play an important role, along with parents, in establishing a solid foundation for children's (SED) development.

When teachers establish a relationship with their learners it is vital that they show their learners that they are able to understand and be supportive. Mia stressed the value of learners being able to trust their teacher which is important for honest communication between teacher and child as she said "*Teachers…they need to show um, how can I say, empathy for a child, you know? Because if you don't show that, the child is going to feel that you don't care for him like almost trust versus mistrust. If the child doesn't trust you then he's never going to want to approach you… He's never going to want to tell you how he feels. Maybe in the morning something happened on the way or something happened at home. He's not going to trust you to come tell you because you are not showing like empathy towards."* Many teachers had a similar opinion as Mia as they expressed their awareness that trust is important. Therefore, they felt that children only open up to them about their troubles if they are comfortable with their teacher.

In order for the teacher-child relationship to fully benefit children teachers try their best to establish a safe and positive environment in which their learners feel comfortable to express themselves and confide in their teachers. Echoing this viewpoint was Liz who believes that "*We need to make them feel safe… It is really important what we say, because imagine I am just here and I am just shouting whole day. They will never open up… In my opinion what we as teachers say and what we do count big time. Because if we shut them down, if we block them down, we don't allow them to be open we're not going to get anything from them… it can*

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be something urgent that they need to tell us and because they don't have a relationship with us, for instance, being bullied maybe, now they don't complain and they don't tell you." Liz (and others) makes a significant statement as she is aware of her role as a teacher and also that children look up to their teachers for support and guidance. Thus, building a trusting relationship entails that teachers are mindful of their interactions with their learners and the environment that they create as this is essential for open communication between teacher and learner.

The qualities and skills that teachers possess aids in creating a warm environment. Teachers use their warmth to create an environment in which their learners are free to speak openly about anything that may be bothering them. For example, Leah strongly felt that teachers should be compassionate and be wholly present as she shared that *"You must always show that you care, that you love…that they can come to your desk for everything you see. You must come on their level... They mustn't be afraid to go to you and say teacher "this one is fighting with me or this one is taking my toys" so you must be there for them ... your mind and your eyes must be always by the children."* Leah and others acknowledge that teachers need to create a safe space in which children can communicate freely.

Considering the above, there is a general consensus that teachers need to establish a connection with their learners in order for them to build a trusting teacher-child relationship. This in turn may be especially viewed as important as teachers are one of the primary socialisation agents outside of the home environment that have an influence on children's socio-emotional development.

4.2.3 Role model

More often than not, children use adults who are in close proximity to them as role models. Teachers are time and again perceived as role models to their learners. They are seen as grown-ups who are knowledgeable, smart, caring, and sometimes even inspiring. This

subtheme points out that children are significantly influenced by those in their immediate environment.

In the classroom the teacher is the adult who models appropriate behaviour in social settings and social interactions. Thus, children often adopt and imitate the behaviour that they are exposed to. Rina is aware that what she says and does in her classroom gets absorbed and imitated by her learners as she states "*For Grade R I'm their biggest role model at the moment so it's what teacher says and teacher says and teacher says. The parents will also say whatever you say they want to do or they look up to you or but "no teacher said we must do it like this so we must do it like this".*

On the same note, Kim tells a story of her behaviour being imitated by one of her learners "*the secretary's grandchild is in my class. So the secretary actually tells me that Jade would actually do what I'm doing and speak the way I'm speaking".* This is a literal example of what Rina says that learners look up to their teachers and act accordingly to what teachers expect of them.

Very similarly, Mia also raises the point that she takes on the responsibility of setting an example for her leaners as she states "*If I maybe speaking to one of the other teachers- we are socialising- so maybe I'm speaking loud or abrupt with one of the other teachers then they are going to pick it up 'oh but teacher is speaking like that with one of the other teachers so we can do it in class speak so with one another'. So it's important for me to set an example for them."* Mia is highly aware that her actions not only in the classroom influences her learners behaviour, but also her actions with her fellow colleagues who are in her learners' proximity have an impact on her learners. Mia recognizes that her learners observe her interactions and relationships with her colleagues and thus makes it a priority to model appropriate social behaviour which emanates respect towards others. Thus, teachers acknowledge the fact that

they are role models for their budding learners and are without a doubt trying to act in the best interests of their learners as evidenced above.

Teachers strive to build a good relationship with their learners which will be beneficial for learners' learning and developmental processes. Thus, the quality of the teacher-child relationship is imperative in the classroom environment relationship and is known to facilitate children's socio-emotional skills.

4.3 Theme 3: Classroom experiences of socio-emotional development

There are many experiences in the classroom on a day to day basis. Sometimes these experiences are challenging for teachers as they are faced with many tasks such as intervening in little squabbles over classroom resources. Classroom challenges in early childhood education are often related to the socio-emotional development of the learners as children's socio-emotional skills are still developing. This theme considers the classroom experiences of preschool teachers, which highlights classroom challenges related to fights, children's ability to follow instructions, as well as socio-emotional immaturity. Teachers therefore assist children's socio-emotional development by encouraging prosocial behaviour.

4.3.1 Fighting

Some teachers shared that occasionally fights break out between pre-schoolers for trivial reasons. A few of the teachers shared some of their experiences of learners' fighting for no other reason than imitating behaviour they are exposed to. Andy for example said that "*The fighting is gonna be there they see it on TV. They do what they see. So, you um as the teacher has to set that rules and keep that discipline.*" Children imitating behaviour is a normal occurrence. However, when children imitate what could be categorised as bad behaviour, it may be somewhat challenging for teachers. In Andy's case, fighting can become a challenge if there is a lack of rules and discipline in the classroom.

On the other hand, teachers also shared that fights occur because of children not sharing. Mia illustrates this point as she says "*they fight a lot and it's because of small things like maybe um I give toys and then maybe two wants that one toy and then now they argue at each other and then the fighting and arguing starts and I need to intervene*". While Andy's experiences of classroom fights are related to behaviour that children are exposed to, Mia's experiences relate to her learners' SED as sharing is something that children learn as they grow. For many children, preschool is usually the first environment where children have to share with other children.

Similar to Mia's experiences, other teachers reported that challenges in the classroom relates to the social skills that children still need to develop. Tia shared that "*The boys are the social problems because they fight a lot. They don't know how to interact with one another.*" Tia finds that her girls are more mature than her boys. In light of Tia's experiences, which is congruent with other teachers' classroom experiences, challenges arise due to children's varying levels of development.

4.3.2 Following instructions

Being able to follow instructions is important in a classroom environment as teachers give children directions so that they can not only learn new skills but also that there is order in the classroom.

The challenge of getting learners to follow instructions is commonly experienced by other teachers. Tia also shared that in addition to her boys fighting, they do not follow instructions as she further states "…*Maybe they don't mean it purposely but they don't like taking turns. Like when I say line up then the boys would just rush in because they are not waiting their turn…*" Tia's experience shows that being able to follow instructions can be linked to turn-taking as she illustrates her classroom experiences of line formation.

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Sharing Tia's challenge is Lily who shared *"It's challenging sitting with them on the mat. You're trying to read the story...Why they disruptive? Why they distract the other children?... Because they cannot handle the pressure... Because they can't follow instructions."*

Slightly different from Tia's experience is Lily's illustration of the difficulty to get her learners to sit quietly during story time, which is an important daily activity for pre-schoolers. Furthermore, Joy shares that listening skills are of a concern in her class as she reported *"one of the main problems nowadays is that they don't listen to instructions"*. Listening skills is vital in the school environment as children need to comprehend what is expected of them in their daily social interactions.

4.3.3 Emotional immaturity

When children start school they are expected to be at a stage where they are mature enough to handle the classroom environment.

Teachers reported that teaching becomes slightly more difficult when children are emotionally immature. Liz gave a brief description of one of her experiences "*One big thing is that if they are spoilt at home. And they come in and they want to do what they want to... So like I have one boy in my class and he is spoilt. He came in here the first day – pinching me, biting me, my bag flew around... He would just go and kick the child if he doesn't get his way. Emotionally they are not ready when they come spoilt. Emotionally they are not ready because they want things on their time*" Liz emphasises that when children are not matured enough for the school environment they do not know how to interact with their peers and teachers.

Very similarly Tia conveyed that the home environment plays a role in preparing children for school. She shared "*some of the children haven't reached the maturity level yet because maybe at home with their parents I know for the first five years of a child's life they are mostly with the mother, so that part is crucial to them to have a good emotional and stable environment at home. So when they come to school it is easy for them to adapt to the*

surroundings here". In view of Tia's experiences, it is challenging for teachers when children are not able to adapt to the classroom environment as they may not have reached the maturity level where they are able to emotionally regulate their feelings.

On the other hand, teachers also find it difficult to deal with children when they are not at the stage where they are able to share and take turns. Abby shared that "*one child in my class I don't think, according to me, he is emotionally ready because he still wants my attention… He doesn't give anyone else a chance to talk… And it is unfair because there are children who never ever get a chance to speak. And for me that shows that he is not emotionally ready to share his teacher's attention with the rest of the class.*" Abby's example shows how children's socio-immaturity can hinder learning experiences for other children in the classroom. Socio-emotional immaturity was a common experience for preschool teachers. Teachers experiences may have varied but their challenges came down to socio-emotional immaturity or lack of social and emotional skills of some of their learners.

4.3.4 Encouraging prosocial behaviour

Some classroom experiences may require teachers to provide children with guidance on how to handle certain situations or behaviours. But in other instances, teachers actively encourage children to adopt certain behaviours, more specifically to adopt prosocial behaviours.

Some teachers reported instances of using classroom situations as lessons for prosocial behaviour. For example, Emily noticed a trend of bad behaviour amongst the girls in her class. She shared "*I recently found out that, or observed that my girls are being nasty with one another... I told them that all of us here ALL OF US, we are all friends, no matter what colour, no matter what size we are, but WE ARE ALL FRIENDS.*" Emily used this matter as a lesson to her learners that they should act kindly towards one another irrespective of minor details such as physical appearance.

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While Emily encourages prosocial behaviour after she notices certain incidences, Rina creates situations that requires prosocial behaviour on the playground as she says "…*we have lots of spades and things so I'll take away of the spades... and then they said like "teacher there's no bucket for me and I want my bucket". So I said "but there is buckets so why don't you ask him if he's finished with it or can you play with him" such things cause they tend to not do that out of their own."* Teachers like Rina sees the act of sharing as something that children need to learn under the guidance of an adult.

On the other hand, other teachers use situations in the classroom as an opportunity to build children's socio-emotional development. Tia for instance uses a sad situation as a chance to teach her learners to share as she says "*If a child doesn't have bread, I don't make it like a big thing... I just say "oh, this one's mommy forgot to put bread in for him today. Who wants to share? Lift up your hand." Then the children will lift up their hands. And the child will go to his classmates that he feels comfortable with. And so then he goes to them and they share the bread and that's how we share every day."* Tia in her example teaches children to care for the well-being of others by making the best of an unfortunate situation and by being sensitive and avoiding unnecessary embarrassment to her learner.

Considering this theme, classroom challenges in early childhood is a common occurrence as some children may be more developed and emotionally mature than others. In light of this, it is expected that preschool teachers may encounter some challenges related to the socio-emotional development of children. Teachers address children's social and emotional difficulties by having one-on-one conversations with the child to uncover if there is an underlying cause for the difficulties displayed. This is usually followed by observation and note-taking of the child for a few days. If difficulties continue then parents are notified. If a problem is perceived as being very serious, the teacher then informs the parents and the principal to ensure that the problem is resolved and that the child is supported. Lastly, teachers

find ways to enhance their learners' socio-emotional development by drawing on different situations and in turn create opportunities to teach their learners prosocial behaviours which develops children's social skills and may even aid in their classroom peer relationship

4.4 Theme 4: Activities to facilitate socio-emotional development

Throughout the school day children engage in many activities that are designed to facilitate different areas of their development such as physical, cognitive, social, and emotional areas. These activities include free play, basic mathematics, creative art, as well as group activities where learners have the opportunity to interact with one another. All teachers mentioned that they follow a daily programme which fulfils the educational needs of their learners. A typical day in the classroom consists of morning ring, mathematics activities, creative art activities, music and movement, playtime, language activities, as well as the usual lunch time break and toilet routine. This programme is similar across the 12 participants, some of who also mentioned drawing activities in relation to stories that are read and discussed in class, more specifically drawings of how stories affected their learners' emotions.

Although teachers did not confidently state that there are specific activities that are used to facilitate learners' socio-emotional development, they shared what happens during the course of the day. Two activities stood out namely fantasy play and morning ring.

4.4.1 Fantasy Play

One of the indoor play activities, called fantasy play, emerged frequently in the data. The fantasy area is known as a place where children can play and express themselves. Kim shared *"fantasy area it's like make believe play you now where they dress up… like um the one would decide I want to be the mommy, the other one would decide I want to be the daddy."* Kim's statement reflects that the fantasy area is the place where children use their imaginations to become whoever they want.

Often, children act out prominent figures in their lives in the fantasy area as discussed by Liz *"that fantasy area is where you see everything. You can see exactly what happens at home. In my personal experience you would see for instance, there was a girl and a boy but the girl said I am the mommy and the other was the daddy and he laid on that bed with his arm behind his head and he was just lying there… Now you thinking is that the daddy figure which they see?".* Once again, the fantasy area provides a space for children to be free to express themselves, both socially and emotionally as they play with their peers. Their expressions and imitations often provides teachers with a lens into their home environment.

On the same note, Tia explains what happens in her classroom's fantasy area *"the fantasy area brings out a whole different side to them. They are able to express themselves in ways that they don't do when I'm around. So I let them go but then I watch them also and I watch how they imitate whichever role models they praise."* Tia sums up Kim and Liz' experiences and infers that the fantasy area is an important part of the daily programme because this space allows children freedom to play and fully express themselves, which is important for their socio-emotional development.
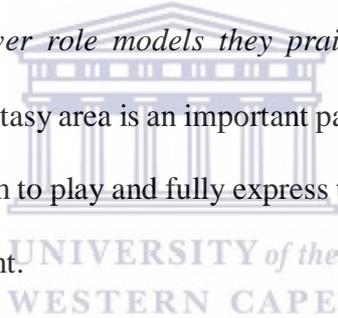
4.4.2 Morning Ring

Morning ring is a daily activity in preschool classrooms where teachers and learners gather to have various discussions. Abby shared *"we have a morning ring where they come to the mat and they tell their news".* Considering Abby's statement morning ring appears to be a social time for learners.

Morning ring is not only a social time for learners, but it is also a time where learners learn and say rhymes. Kim reported *"Morning ring is where we come in the morning like we come to our class and then we would play, we would sing choruses, we'd say the days of the week, the months of the year, we will do our calendar, we will do our birthday chart, we will do our seasons, and we will do our counting and then will do our theme discussion where we*

all interact". Kim provides more detail as to what happens during morning ring time, showing that the morning ring is not only an opportunity for children to share their news, like Abby says, but also a time for learning a set theme.

Similarly, Andy shared *"in the morning ring we do recitals, the discussion of the day… we're doing transport now so we're doing all the different kinds of transport then we discuss it with all of them and we ask them questions… then they must answer"*. Based on Andy, learners are challenged with questions which they answer in the circle. This is an opportunity for children to communicate their thoughts with their peers and teachers and also learn in the process.

The preschool daily programme consists of many activities that are both educational and fun for children, which facilitates all areas of their development. However, fantasy play and morning ring activities were seen to be strongly associated with facilitating children's socio-emotional development. These activities provide learners with an outlet to express their emotions during play, to enhance their socio-emotional skills by engaging with peers, as well as learning material that have been set out for them.
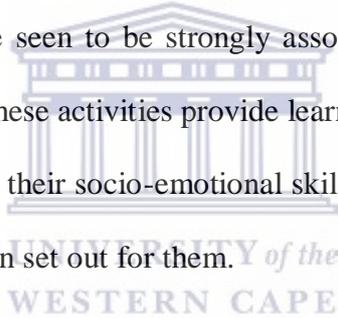
4.5 Theme 5: Importance of socio-emotional development for school readiness

When children are in school they need to be able to handle the classroom environment. Socio-emotional development is essential for school readiness as it contains many aspects that ensures that children will be able to adapt to the classroom environment as well as their teachers and peers. This theme highlights teachers' understanding of what school readiness means and what social and emotional skills are deemed important for school readiness.

4.5.1 School readiness

School readiness is essential for children to thrive in school. It encompasses a variety of developmental areas such as cognitive, physical, social, and emotional development. When

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exploring teachers' opinions on school readiness, teachers often expressed that school readiness was not purely academic.

Tia described school readiness as follows "*For me it is not based on age or appearance. You need to be holistically developed in all areas or at least successful in most of your areas*". Noteworthy here is that Tia strongly feels that school readiness is not dependent on age, which is important considering that school readiness entails more than being the required age for school entry.

Having appropriate development in the necessary areas is a very common opinion amongst teachers as Rina also views school readiness as a broad concept which comprises holistic development as she states *"I guess holistically, everything, like cognitively ready, emotionally ready, socially ready, physically ready, you know there are children that came to me and they knew so much but they were still playful"*. Even though Rina says that holistic development is important, she also says that being emotionally mature enough for a classroom environment is important for school readiness. This is an important point as there are many pressures in the classroom and being able to cope with one's surroundings is of great importance. This is especially true for children who are starting school which comes with its own set of adaptations and challenges including being able to sit and complete activities.

Moreover, some teachers felt that independence is essential for school readiness as teachers like Amy believes that "*by going to big school they must try to stand on their own feet like be independent you see? all his development must be right. that child must be… emotionally strong, and um socially he needs to stand up for himself*". Amy takes describing school readiness a step further than only referring to holistic development as she provides examples of what is expected of children when they start school both socially and emotionally.

4.5.2 Social and emotional skills for school readiness

As previously stated school readiness according to teachers consists of a number of developmental areas.

Upon reviewing the data, a number of social and emotional skills were put forward by teachers, many of which are shared by Rina "*when they come they need to be self-confident. They should feel independent by that time you know when they start school because it is 8 hours where they're not at home...being able to speak to other children and not in a baby manner... they must also be able to problem-solve you know because emotionally you gonna take a knock- there is a child that is going to be cattish with you... they must be independent where it comes to looking after your own things... and being able to use the toilet on their own and eating on their own*". From Rina's (and many other participants) point of view, one very important skill for children to have upon entering school is independence. Children should be relatively independent when they start school because they are away from home and away from their comfort zone for a good portion of the day. Another point which stands out from Rina is that learners should have an age appropriate vocabulary, which is greatly linked to the way children are socialised from birth.

On the other hand, teachers said that a having the ability to emotionally cope in the classroom environment is vital as some children are so fragile that the even the slightest noise hinders their ability to focus or frightens them. Liz believes that "*when a child comes to school he needs to be... able to cope... express and tell you how they feel and say that they don't understand or tell you when they need help*". Here Liz emphasises the importance of children being able to voice their concerns and opinions especially when they lack clarity or desire assistance.

From a slightly different angle, Joy considers how a lack of emotional maturity can affect a teacher in a classroom as she says "*I would say if they don't have those skills then the*

responsibility of that child is going to be all on one person and you're sitting with 39 children in a class… a child is not independent or not emotionally ready and cries when somebody just touches her…. how is a teacher supposed to cope with that?". Joy raises a key point which is that socio-emotional skills is important for a child's adaptation to the classroom environment. This is especially important when class numbers are large and the learner to teacher ratio is bigger than usual.

SED is seen as a major factor when one considers school readiness. This is evident in the findings as teachers indicated that children require holistic development to be school ready, which includes social and emotional development. According to the participants' children need to be able to cope with varying situations in the classroom environment, they need to be independent, emotionally matured enough to handle the pressures of school as well as able to be at least get along with their peers.
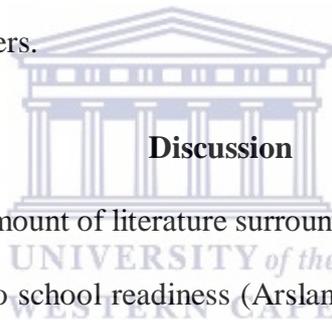
Discussion

Although there is a vast amount of literature surrounding socio-emotional development in early childhood and its links to school readiness (Arslan et al., 2011; Papadopoulou et al., 2014) on a global level, there is a limited research in the South African context focusing on preschool teachers' understanding of socio-emotional development in early childhood. The current study contributes to this limited body of research by having explored preschool teachers' understanding and classroom experiences of socio-emotional development in early childhood and the role it plays in school readiness in the South African context.

Preschool teachers' understanding of socio-emotional development

By exploring teachers understanding of socio-emotional development the findings of the study revealed that preschool teachers had a sound understanding of what SED entails. More specifically, participants relayed that what happens in the home environment with regards to parents' interactions with their child has a lot of influence on children's socio-emotional

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development. These findings are supported by previous research which suggest that children's social and emotional competence is influenced by socialisation and the role that parents or primary caregivers play in their upbringing (Humpries et al., 2014), as well as nurturing and responsive environments (Aviles et al., 2006). Moreover, participants described SED as entailing various interpersonal skills such as communication, social interactions, expression of emotions, sharing, and being cooperative with teachers' instructions as constituting socio-emotional development. The reason why teachers may have linked interpersonal skills to socio-emotional development is because the skills associated with these areas of development are influenced by children's relationships with adults and their peers. These findings concur with previous research (Kiliç, 2015; Papadopoulou et al., 2014; Piotrkowski et al., 2000) which found that preschool teachers see maturity as a main component of socio-emotional development. More specifically, that socio-emotional development includes different interpersonal and intrapersonal competencies such as sharing and being cooperative (Kiliç, 2015), recognising, expressing, and managing emotions as well as being able to express emotions and being independent (Papadopoulou et al., 2014).
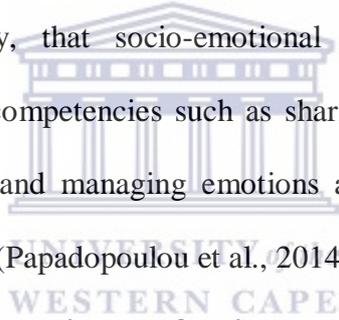
Preschool teachers' classroom experiences of socio-emotional development

Teachers classroom experiences of socio-emotional development is based on four main aspects: the teacher-child relationship; the challenges they experience with regard to learners' socio-emotional development; how they use teachable moments to encourage prosocial behaviour; and how they facilitate learners' socio-emotional development with the use of classroom activities.

The importance of teacher-child relationship is well documented as strong and supportive relationships between teachers and learners are vital to the healthy development of learners (eg. Birch & Ladd, 1997; Hamre & Pianta, 2001; Pianta & Stuhlman, 2004). Teachers highlighted a number of qualities that they thought are effective when facilitating children's

socio-emotional development. Some of these qualities related to the characteristics of teachers, while others were seen as skills that teachers should possess to effectively facilitate children's sed. Prior research suggests that of the basic characteristics that constitutes an effective teacher having a love for children is of utmost importance as well as effective communication skills (Soulis, 2009). Moreover, effective teachers are creative, respectful to learners especially by showing sensitivity to learners' feelings, and are able to make learners feel welcome and comfortable in their classroom (Walker, 2008). These qualities are important for early childhood teachers to have as children require adults to be able to nurture them even within the school context where learning occurs.

In addition, development occurs in an environment which allows growth and learning to occur. It is known that trusting, warm, and responsive teacher-child relationships and interactions plays an important role in laying the foundation for children to develop socio-emotional skills (Howes et al., 2008; Papadopoulou et al., 2014) as well as for effective teaching practices to take place (Corso, 2007). Consistent with previous research, participants see value in creating a warm and supportive classroom environment which not only provides learners the opportunity for self-expression and emotional support, but also aids in later academic achievements (Hamre & Pianta, 2005; Kiliç, 2015). In fact, research shows that children who receive a higher emotional classroom quality show greater social skills and fewer behavioural problems by the end of preschool (Broekhuizen et al., 2016; Broekhuizen et al., 2017). Furthermore, it is well established in research that socio-emotional development is influenced by adults in children's environment (Boyd et al., 2005; Lynch & Simpson, 2010). A key finding suggests that teachers view themselves as role models which concurs with previous work which found that teachers desire to be excellent role models for their preschool learners (Hedge, Sugita, Crane-Mitchell & Averett, 2014). It is clear that teachers realise the importance of modelling and encouraging appropriate and prosocial behaviours in their

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classrooms as their learners are always observing them. Thus realise that their important role and that they can contribute to learners' development either positively or negatively.

Another finding of this study is that teachers experience challenges related to learners socio-emotional development such fighting, inability to work independently and emotional immaturity in the classroom environment. These problems are well documented in early research as it was found that teachers may encounter these problems when children lack socio-emotional skills (Rimm-Kaufmann et al., 2000). Indeed, the most prevalent problem for preschool teachers is the difficulties that learners have with following instructions (Rimm-Kaufmann et al., 2000). The current findings share some similarities with Espinosa et al. (1997) who found that rural preschool teachers are challenged with children who are unable to sit still and pay attention, and have trouble with turn-taking and sharing. Moreover, children who have difficulty in emotion regulation may display more problem behaviours and have less positive relationships and interactions (Graziano, Reavis, Keane & Calkins, 2007). Preschool teachers are likely to encounter challenges with some children's socio-emotional skills because even though development is similar across children, what differs is the rate at which children develop. Children develop differently as a result of various factors. These factors include but are not limited to the influence of nutrition, dietary deficiencies, parenting practices, and an unstimulating home environment (Pem, 2015), which ultimately affects children's rate of development. Furthermore, children are expected to build on their socio-emotional skills in the preschool years as prior research acknowledges that the preschool years provides children with the opportunity to learn how to interact with their peers in a constructive way as they learn to explore communication skills and conflict resolution within their social environment (Ray & Smith, 2010). These challenges that teachers are presented with provide 'teachable moments' and opportunities for teachers so that they encourage prosocial behaviour.

Part of teachers' classroom experiences with socio-emotional development is when they encourage prosocial behaviour. Findings suggest that teachers encourage prosocial behaviour as a way to address negative situations that arise or to provide learners the opportunity to develop their socio-emotional skills, which may help children's interpersonal relationships. Research demonstrates that when children are exposed to environments that encourage and foster prosocial behaviour it positively improves their social competence as well as their socio-emotional development, learning and health (Flook, Goldberg, Pinger & Davidson, 2015). Another reason why teachers may encourage and teach prosocial behaviour because it may aid in reducing the development of emotional and behavioural problems (Vahedi et al., 2012).

In addition, the current study found that play is one of the activities that are used to facilitate children's socio-emotional development. Playtime is essential for children's socio-emotional development and previous research shows that children need more play time to improve their socio-emotional development (Wathu, 2016). Fantasy play is also referred to as sociodramatic play which involves "voluntary social role-taking involving two or more children" (Levy, Schaefer & Phelps, 1986, p.134). Research supports fantasy play for the development of socio-emotional skills (Hughes, 1999; Wathu, 2016) as it requires children to think before acting, to sense the perspectives of others, as well as emotional regulation and understanding (McArdle, 2001).

Teachers understanding of the role that socio-emotional development plays in preparing the child for school

The findings of this study aligns with international literature (Lin et al., 2003; Leseman, 2012; Pekdoğan & Akgül, 2017; Piotrkowski et al., 2000; Webster-Stratton & Reid, 2004) that teachers place more value on socio-emotional skills for school readiness than academic knowledge. Teachers shared various socio-emotional skills such as being able to communicate

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their feelings/needs, take turns, share, follow instructions, being independent and emotionally mature enough to handle the pressures in one's environment. These findings are similar to other studies which focuses on social or emotional development and competence in the preschool years (eg. Kiliç, 2015; Papadopoulou et al., 2014). These findings may be due to the fact that irrespective of the context in which children live, the school environment requires these skills and competencies of children in order for them to not only be taught but to be taught successfully. In addition, socio-emotional skills are especially important in classrooms where learner to teacher ratio is grossly uneven. In these situations, teachers cannot effectively teach and learners cannot effectively learn (Marais, 2016).

In light of previous literature and the findings of this study, many teachers experience behavioural problems in their classrooms (Boyd et al., 2005; de Witt & Lessings, 2013; Marais & Meier, 2010; Rimm-Kaufman, Pianta & Cox 2000). Difficult classroom behaviour may be due to many factors such as home environment stressors and classroom characteristics (Bennet, Elliot & Peters, 2005; Hoglund & Leadbeater, 2004), but the findings of this study indicate that a contributing factor may also be poor socio-emotional development of preschool children. When children enter the school environment with age-appropriate socio-emotional development, they are more capable of handling complex social situations with appropriate interactional skills, develop friendships, and participate in positive interactions with their peers (Buysse, Goldman, West & Hollingsworth, 2008). These skills aid the child's transition to formal schooling (Grade 1) and improves the odds for positive academic outcomes (Denham, 2006). But, difficulty with such skills are associated with children being more likely to display persistent aggression, have oppositional defiant behaviours, and be socially isolated (Campbell, 2002; Webster-Stratton & Reid, 2003). Furthermore, children who have difficult behaviours (eg. following instructions, rules and getting along with others), often perform poorly academically in comparison to their peer counterparts who display prosocial behaviours

(McClelland, Morrison & Holmes, 2000). Socio-emotional difficulties may continue as children age and may manifest in adolescent delinquency, antisocial behaviour, and contribute to school dropout rates (Nagin & Tremblay, 2001; LaCourse et al., 2002).

In addition, difficulties in socio-emotional development in preschool has implications for teachers, peers, and society. This is due to teachers having to take time to address these issues, which in turn in impacts on teaching time and impeding the learning of other learners in the class (Sun & Shek, 2012). Without intervention, the long-term implications for the troubles stemming from difficulties in socio-emotional development create burdens for society in terms of juvenile delinquency and adult crime (Boyd et al., 2005).

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CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

Age appropriate socio-emotional development is vital for school readiness and success in most areas of one's life. Acknowledging the important role that preschool teachers play in laying a solid foundation for children's development and school readiness, the current study aimed to explored preschool teachers' understanding and classroom experiences of socio-emotional development in early childhood and the role it plays in school readiness. This was achieved by considering three objectives: (1) pre-school teachers' understanding of the concept of socio-emotional development; (2) understanding teachers' classroom experiences in terms of the socio-emotional development of preschool learners; and (3) teachers' understanding of the role that socio-emotional development plays in preparing the child for school.

The findings of this study suggests that teachers' understanding of the concept of socio-emotional development consists of both interpersonal and intrapersonal skills which includes communication skills, problem solving, and emotional maturity. Based on these findings, teachers are aware of the important social and emotional skills that pre-schoolers should have and therefore may be able to identify when learners in their class present with developmental or behavioural difficulties related to socio-emotional development.

In relation to teachers' classroom experiences of socio-emotional development, teachers are aware of the importance of creating a warm and emotionally supportive environment which can foster children's socio-emotional development and its associated skills. This conducive environment includes handling challenging behaviour, teaching children lessons of prosocial behaviour when teachers feel it is needed, as well as setting a good example for learners.

Lastly, preschool teachers view age appropriate socio-emotional development as absolutely essential for starting formal schooling, which is Grade 1. Teachers feel that children

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should not only be cognitively developed to start school but they should also have social skills and be relatively independent.

5.1 Strengths and limitations of the study

The strength in this study is related to the use of both preschool and Grade R teachers for a broad view of socio-emotional development and its importance for school readiness. The findings of this study provides contextual information that can inform planning and policies for early childhood education.

The limitation of this study is related to its validity as member checking could not be arranged with participants due to time constraints and participants' availability. This study only considered two low-income areas in Cape Town.

5.2 Recommendations

Considering the findings of this study, more research should focus on how both parents and teachers view preschool children's socio-emotional competence in low income areas within the Western Cape. Low-income areas can negatively affect the socio-emotional development of children. This may aid in motivating the need for socio-emotional learning programmes in early childhood education centres to further facilitate young children's development. Moreover, given that findings indicate a lack of emotional maturity in some preschool children, and the importance of socio-emotional development in relation to academic outcomes, future research should consider a socio-emotional learning programme intervention in government grade R programmes.

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APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW GUIDE

Section A: demographic information

- Age:

- Gender:

- Qualification(s):

- Years of teaching experience:

Section B: interview questions

1. **To explore preschool teachers' understanding of the concept of socio-emotional development.**

    - What is your understanding of social development in preschool children?

    - What is you understanding of emotional development in preschool children?

    - What is your understanding of socio-emotional development in preschool children?

2. **To understand the teachers' classroom experiences in terms of the socio-emotional development of preschool learners**

    - In your experience, do you think that the way in which you, as a teacher, interact with your learners influences their socio-emotional development?
        - If yes/no, why do you think so?

    - What are the most challenges in terms of socio-emotional development do you experience in your classroom on a daily basis?

    - Do you employ activities to facilitate the socio-emotional development of your preschool learner?
        - If yes, what kinds of activities do you use in your classroom to develop children's socio-emotional skills?
        - If no, why not? Can you please explain?

    - When you notice that a learner in your class is displaying difficulties with their socio-emotional development, such as not being able to express their feelings, having difficulty establishing relationships with their peers etc., how do you go about addressing the matter? Eg. Activities, contacting parents?

    - In your opinion, what are the kind of skills that teachers require in assisting children's socio-emotional development?

3. **To explore teachers' understanding of the role that socio-emotional development plays in preparing the child for school.**

    - In your opinion, what does it mean when a child is said to be ready for school?
    - What are the essential social and emotional skills that children need when they start school?
    - Why do you think these skills are important for school readiness?

APPENDIX B: SCHOOL PERMISSION LETTER

UNIVERSITY OF THE WESTERN CAPE

Private Bag X 17, Bellville 7535, South Africa

Tel: +27 21-959 2283 Fax: 27 21-959 3515

<div align="right">

Primary School Name
Date

</div>

Dear Principal

PERMISSION TO CONDUCT A RESEARCH STUDY AT YOUR SCHOOL

I, Tessa Goldschmidt, a Research Psychology Masters student at the University of the Western Cape, am doing my Masters' thesis in the area of early childhood. The study is aimed at exploring preschool teachers' understanding and classroom experience of socio-emotional development in early childhood and the role it plays in school readiness. The objectives of the study are: (1) to explore pre-school teachers' understanding of the concept of socio-emotional development; (2) to understand the teachers' classroom experiences in terms of the socio-emotional development of preschool learners; and (3) to explore teachers' understanding of the role that socio-emotional development plays in preparing the child for school.

I would like to invite your Grade R educators to participate in this study. This will include a one-hour interview with each educator who agrees to participate. I would like to conduct the interviews in the third term of this year.

The project has received ethics clearance from the Senate Research Ethics Committee of the University of the Western Cape (Reg. No. HS/17/5/16). Should you agree to participate, I will request permission from the Western Cape Education Department (WCED) to conduct the study at your school. Information sheets and consent forms will be distributed to the educators, once approval has been obtained from the WCED.

Please feel free to contact the details below should you have any queries in this regard.

Sincerely,
Tessa Goldschmidt
Department of Psychology,
University of the Western Cape
Email: tjgoldschmidt@gmail.com

APPENDIX C: RESEARCH APPROVAL LETTER FROM WCED

Western Cape Government
Education

Directorate: Research
Audrey.wyngaard@westerncape.gov.za
tel: +27 021 467 9272
Fax: 0865902282
Private Bag x9114, Cape Town, 8000
wced.wcape.gov.za

REFERENCE: 20170823–4215
ENQUIRIES: Dr A T Wyngaard

Dear Ms Tessa Goldschmidt

RESEARCH PROPOSAL: **THE EXPLORATION OF PRESCHOOL TEACHERS' UNDERSTANDING AND CLASSROOM EXPERIENCES OF SOCIO-EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN EARLY CHILDHOOD AND THE ROLE IT PLAYS IN SCHOOL READINESS**

Your application to conduct the above-mentioned research in schools in the Western Cape has been approved subject to the following conditions:
1.   Principals, educators and learners are under no obligation to assist you in your investigation.
2.   Principals, educators, learners and schools should not be identifiable in any way from the results of the investigation.
3.   You make all the arrangements concerning your investigation.
4.   Educators' programmes are not to be interrupted.
5.   The Study is to be conducted from **28 August 2017 till 29 September 2017**
6.   No research can be conducted during the fourth term as schools are preparing and finalizing syllabi for examinations (October to December).
7.   Should you wish to extend the period of your survey, please contact Dr A.T Wyngaard at the contact numbers above quoting the reference number?
8.   A photocopy of this letter is submitted to the principal where the intended research is to be conducted.
9.   Your research will be limited to the list of schools as forwarded to the Western Cape Education Department.
10.   A brief summary of the content, findings and recommendations is provided to the Director: Research Services.
11.   The Department receives a copy of the completed report/dissertation/thesis addressed to:
12.

> **The Director: Research Services**
> **Western Cape Education Department**
> **Private Bag X9114**
> **CAPE TOWN**
> **8000**

We wish you success in your research.
Kind regards.
Signed: Dr Audrey T Wyngaard
Directorate: Research
DATE: 23 August 2017

Lower Parliament Street, Cape Town, 8001   Private Bag X9114, Cape Town, 8000
tel: +27 21 467 9272   fax: 0865902282   Employment and salary enquiries: 0861 92 33 22
Safe Schools: 0800 45 46 47   www.westerncape.gov.za

APPENDIX D: INFORMATION SHEET

UNIVERSITY OF THE WESTERN CAPE
Private Bag X 17, Bellville 7535, South Africa
Tel: +27 21-959 2852 Fax: 27 21-959 3515
E-mail: tjgoldschmidt@gmail.com

INFORMATION SHEET

Project Title: The exploration of preschool teachers' understanding and classroom experience of socio-emotional development in early childhood and the role it plays in school readiness.

What is this study about?

This is a research project being conducted by Tessa Goldschmidt at the University of the Western Cape. We are inviting you to participate in this research project because you play a fundamental role in preschool children's holistic development. The purpose of this research project is to address the lack of research concerning the socio-emotional development of preschool children in the South African context. In order to maximise children's developmental potential, this study aims to explore what you as a preschool teacher understand about socio-emotional development and the role it plays in school readiness.

What will I be asked to do if I agree to participate?

You will be asked to avail yourself for a one-hour interview. The interview will be conducted at a time that is most convenient for you. Your permission will be requested to audio-record the interview. The interview questions are aimed at gaining your understanding and classroom experience of preschool children's socio-emotional development. More specifically, some demographic information about yourself (age, gender, qualification level, years of teaching experience), your understanding of socio-emotional development, you understanding of school readiness, and your classroom experiences in terms of children's socio-emotional development.

Would my participation in this study be kept confidential?

The researcher undertakes to protect your identity and the nature of your contribution. To ensure your anonymity, your name will be replaced with a pseudonym on the collected data, through the use of this pseudonym the researcher will be able to link your interview to your identity, and only the researcher will have access to the identification key.

To ensure your confidentiality, the recorded audio-files will be stored in a secure space where only the researcher and supervisor will have access. In addition, transcribed transcripts will be secured by password-protected computer files. If we write a report or article about this research project, your identity will be protected.

What are the risks of this research?

All human interactions and talking about self or others carry some amount of risks. As such all research carries some risk. We will nevertheless minimise such risks and act promptly to assist you if you experience any discomfort, psychological or otherwise during the process of your participation in this study. Where necessary, an appropriate referral will be made to a suitable professional for further assistance or intervention.

What are the benefits of this research?
This research is not designed to help you personally, but the results may help the investigator learn more about preschool children's socio-emotional development in Cape Town. We hope that, in the future, other people might benefit from this study through improved understanding of preschool teachers' understanding of socio-emotional development and the role it plays in South African children's school readiness, which may also provide a basis for future intervention programmes for facilitating young children's socio-emotional development.

Do I have to be in this research and may I stop participating at any time?
Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You may choose not to take part at all. If you decide to participate in this research, you may stop participating at any time. If you decide not to participate in this study or if you stop participating at any time, you will not be penalized or lose any benefits to which you otherwise qualify.

What if I have questions?
This research is being conducted by Tessa Goldschmidt at the University of the Western Cape. If you have any questions about the research study itself, please contact Tessa Goldschmidt at: 0714341914 or tjgoldschmidt@gmail.com.

Should you have any questions regarding this study and your rights as a research participant or if you wish to report any problems you have experienced related to the study, please contact:

Dr. Maria Florence
Deputy Head of Department: Psychology
University of the Western Cape
Private Bag X17
Bellville 7535
mflorence@uwc.ac.za

Prof José Frantz
Dean of the Faculty of Community and Health Sciences
University of the Western Cape
Private Bag X17
Bellville 7535
chs-deansoffice@uwc.ac.za

This research has been approved by the University of the Western Cape's Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee.(REFERENCE NUMBER: HS/17/5/17)

APPENDIX E: CONSENT FORM

UNIVERSITY OF THE WESTERN CAPE

Private Bag X 17, Bellville 7535, South Africa

Tel: +27 21-959 2453, Fax: 27 21-959 3515

E-mail: tjgoldschmidt@gmail.com

CONSENT FORM

Title of Research Project: The exploration of preschool teachers' understanding and classroom experience of socio-emotional development in early childhood and the role it plays in school readiness

The study has been described to me in language that I understand. My questions about the study have been answered. I understand what my participation will involve and I agree to participate of my own choice and free will. I understand that my identity will not be disclosed to anyone. I understand that when I give permission to have the interview audio-recorded it will be stored in a safe place with only the researcher and supervisor having access to the audio-file. I understand that I may withdraw from the study at any time without giving a reason and without fear of negative consequences or loss of benefits.

Participant's name ………………………..

Participant's signature……………………………….

Date………………………