

2019

Dissertation: Professionalism in Trinidad and Tobago's Early Childhood Sector: A Case Study

Cynthia Juliana Celestin
Walden University

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Cynthia Juliana Celestin

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Walden University
2019

Abstract

Professionalism in Trinidad and Tobago's Early Childhood Sector: A Case Study

by

Cynthia Juliana Celestin

MEd, University of the West Indies, 2008

B. Ed, University of the West Indies, 2005

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Early Childhood Education

Walden University

August 2019

Abstract

This case study explored early childhood practitioners' responses to government mandates for increased professionalism in Trinidad and Tobago. The impact of those mandates on their personal and professional lives and their conceptions of professionalism. The study addressed government concerns about lack of professionalism in early childhood care and education; informed policymakers of the challenges therein; and included practitioners' voices in international discourse on professionalism. Change theory, systems thinking, and voice elicitation formed the conceptual framework for understanding changes needed to increase professionalism in the sector. The meaning of professionalism as defined in mandates, difference between practitioners' and officials' definitions of professionalism, practitioners' view on the impacts of mandates, and how those impacts should be addressed were explained. Data were collected in interviews, focus groups, official documents, activity plans, and journal of 12 practitioners, and from the national standards, curriculum guide, and school's code of conduct. Discourse and content analysis were used to identify patterns and themes in the data. Key findings were that mandates had more negative than positive impacts; children were underserved; teachers were frustrated and confused by impractical demands; and some administrators lacked content knowledge and leadership skills. Government officials, practitioners, and stakeholders need to dialogue to resolve problems illuminated by this study. Revision of legislative documents, fiscal adjustments for Trinidad and Tobago, continuous professional development, ongoing research, and national sensitization of practitioners' role will yield a better understanding of early childhood care and education, the catalyst for nationwide social change.

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my father, Ken; Kendal; and my grandchildren.

Acknowledgments

It would be remiss of me not to thank my family, parents, friends, and colleagues who journeyed with and helped me throughout doctoral studies at Walden University. I could not have attained this academic milestone without your incessant love, support, and belief in me. I remain eternally grateful that each of you were there to listen, counsel, proof-read and edit, provide a shoulder to cry on, and pray with me during my injury which delayed progress to completion. Your resounding faith in my recovery and successful completion propelled me to try harder, to work through the pain, to walk again, and get back on track. Thank you.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Introduction

The topic of this case study is professionalism in Trinidad and Tobago's early childhood sector. The study explored the views of 12 early childhood practitioners in Trinidad and Tobago's early childhood sector regarding teacher professionalism. These practitioners work with the 3 to 5 year old children, which specifically pertain to young children attending early childhood care and education (ECCE) establishments operated by both the government and private enterprises. Early childhood practitioners, sometimes called early educators or early childhood teachers, shared thoughts, feelings, and views about government mandates for increased professionalism, through two interviews, two focus group meetings, journals, and activity plans. The practitioners talked about how professionalism can be improved in ECCE and the support systems they needed to embark on those changes.

Such a study was worthwhile to Trinidad and Tobago because of the dearth of early childhood and teacher professionalism research in general, and especially on professionalism in early childhood care and education. The results of this study filled those gaps by adding to the body of literature, providing insight into how professionalism was thought of and enacted by practitioners, and the impact of government mandates on practitioners' personal and professional lives. Additionally, the study illuminating how practitioners thought changes could be generated in their practice and the system to increase professionalism in the sector. As a result of the study, social change will be generated concerning how professionalism in ECCE is conceptualized, how official

documents regard and judge practitioner professionalism, and how the systems driving provision of ECCE services are changed to more practically meet the country's reality. Additionally, the findings of the study highlighted information regarding the successful implementation of government-mandated educational changes in developing countries.

Chapter 1 is organized into 13 sections. In the introduction, I outline the parameters of early childhood in terms of human development and ECCE services, as well as provide a brief historical preview of the genesis of policy regarding professionalism in early childhood education globally. This is followed by the background of the study that includes a brief summary of literature related to the study, descriptions of the gaps in knowledge in the discipline, and a justification of why the study was needed. In the problem statement section, I provide evidence that the problem is current, relevant, and significant and explain that this study builds upon current research findings. Proceeding from this is the purpose of the study in which the research paradigm, intent, and concept of interest in the study are delineated. One overarching research question is followed by three supplementary questions that are stated before I present the conceptual framework of the study, discussing the theoretical propositions and how those propositions relate to the approach and research questions of the study. The nature of the study includes a rationale for the design of the study and a summary of the methodology. The definition of terms section is followed by the assumptions section, in which aspects of the study that are believed but cannot be demonstrated to be true are clarified. The scope and delimitations section contain a description of the aspects of the research problem the study addresses, the boundaries of the study, and potential

transferability. The limitation section, in which I describe the limits of the study in terms of design, transferability, and dependability precedes the summary section that concludes the chapter.

Background

In this section, readers will encounter a brief summary of the early childhood period of development and the care, provisions, and programs appropriate for the early years of life; as well as a summary of global research literature relating to professionalism in early childhood education from practitioners' perspectives and how government mandates affected practice in classrooms. Early childhood is the period of human development starting from birth and reaching up to 8 years old (Berk, 2010; Papilia, Olds, & Feldman, 2009; Santrock, 2002). This period spans three critical developmental stages in the early life of every human being: birth to 18 months (i.e., infancy), 18 months to 36 months (i.e., toddlerhood), and 3 to 8 years (i.e., early childhood; Berk, 2010; Papilia, Olds, & Feldman, 2009; Santrock, 2002). ECCE refers to informal, away-from-home services and programs that cater to the holistic development of young children ages birth to 5 or 6 years old before they enter primary school, which is considered to be the beginning of formal education (Gordon & Browne, 2017; Morrison, 2015).

Traditionally, across the world, the care of young children is viewed as the family's responsibility. The advent of world wars, the increasing demands for workers, and family needs caused many women, the caregivers of young children, to enter the workforce; consequently, in response to this global, societal trend, spaces and services are offered by anyone with interest in taking care of young children while their mothers

work (Gordon & Browne, 2017). Service to young children during the post war era was simply custodial care, based on cultural, personal experiences of caring for young children and occurred at family or caregivers' homes (Morrison, 2015). Providers of those services were untrained in the care of children, and there was neither government interest in nor regulation of those services, which sprouted like mushrooms on fertile ground (Logie, 1995). Logie also noted that increasingly, social trends drove demand for child care services, which grew in tandem as low income, worthy employment.

Logie (1995) stated that during the 1800s, a ground swell, born out of new and humane conceptions of childhood and to alleviate the suffering of children, started in the colonializing countries of Spain, France, England, and America. The movement was grounded in the work of early philosophers and psychologists who called for better treatment of young children who would be the world's future leaders. According to Logie, slowly, but inevitably, that movement trickled through to the colonies where landowners imported caregivers for their children; however, the native people were left to their own ad hoc child care services.

Logie (1995) continued by stating that gradually, native child care providers began mirroring imported caregivers' routines, and parents started seeking places for their children in elementary school systems established by the colonial masters. The author stated to ensure native children a place in elementary schools, care providers started infusing reading, writing, arithmetic, and rote learning of colonializing cultural pros and practices into the service they provided. Thus, ECCE was born in Trinidad and Tobago.

The latter part of the 20th century heralded the standards movement in education driven by other professional organizations having researched and developed standards for their content areas. Serafini (2002) suggested a rationale for the creation of teaching standards that indicated when demands were placed on students to achieve standards became more rigorous, it was essential that the education system be staffed with professionals capable of teaching to achieve those standards. Standards for students, therefore, must be matched by standards for teachers. According to Weems (2003), educational policy and reform initiatives should be focused on the professional teacher and emphasize the professionalizing of teachers to increase their expert knowledge base through a series of professional development programs to improve teacher quality. This model of professionalism juxtaposed scientific and moral ideas about the role of the teacher in society and served as key discourse ingredients in educational reform.

Craig and Fieschi (2007) posited that society looks to teachers to ensure children's safety and learning, for salvation from every social ill, and become frustrated when that salvation lacks immediacy. Teachers are deeply entrenched in the social psyche. Parents and pupils trust in teachers, and teachers' own shared norms and ethics shaped teacher professionalism (Craig & Fieschi). The authors continued by saying that currently, professionalism is a source of constraint, exhaustion, and lacked creativity. In shaping their professionalism, teachers today feel they have less control over their work and that their judgment is not valued. Tension in definition of professionalism exists between teachers' daily work, personal investment, and policy demands (Craig & Fieschi). To ameliorate that tension, professional organizations have formulated

regulations, rules, and rituals as unifying, shared mechanisms; however, teacher diversity and the difficult challenges they face daily strain professionalism, eroding the binding power of those mechanisms (Moore & Clarke, 2016; Osgood, 2012).

Generally, government mandates have impacted the early childhood sector in unprecedented ways. Government demands for increased accountability and quality in ECCE were viewed by Dalli (2008), Miller (2008), and Osgood (2012) as developmentally inappropriate for the age group. The demands undermined educational practices that research showed were in the best interest of young children's optimal development and learning (Dalli, 2008; Miller, 2008; Osgood, 2012). Current standards, like No Child Left Behind (NCLB) in the United States and those emanating from The Office for Standards in Education in the United Kingdom, were not based on knowledge of child development (i.e., both how children learn and what they learn). These were policies that supported an overemphasis on testing and assessment at the expense of all other aspects of early childhood education; and cumulatively, these current policies were viewed by Brock (2012), Dalli (2008), Karila (2008), Miller (2008), Osgood (2012), Weems (2003), Woodrow (2008), and Taggart (2016) as promoting a deprofessionalization of early childhood teachers.

The discourse and on-going debate about teacher professionalism in the early childhood sector was studied by Brock (2006). In a doctoral dissertation, Brock found that being a professional working with young children was not just about meeting standards, it was about attitude, ideology, and passion; however, these qualities were sometimes sublimated in an attempt to meet accountability demands. Early childhood

teachers reported interpreting standards as they were stated and endeavoring to meet them exactly, wanting to achieve and do their best whether they were working with children or training and assessing adults. According to Brock, many early childhood practitioners conformed to those standards, even though they did not believe that some of what they delivered was in the best interest of the children they served.

According to Oberthuermer (2005), prior to the introduction of federally mandated guidelines, early childhood curriculum had professional autonomy, with practitioners making the decisions about practice. That professional autonomy has been eroded by federal mandates for accountability (Oberthuermer). The author found that whilst early educators might value the improved status offered by standards and regulations, they felt that adherence to a prescribed framework undermined their professional autonomy, knowledge base, and core ideologies, resulting in more federal control that often contradicted beliefs regarding play, learning, and care. Urban (2008) argued that the prevailing conceptualization of the early childhood profession was constructed out of a particular hierarchical mode of producing and applying expert knowledge that was not necessarily appropriate to professional practice in the field. Urban posited that although federal mandates are generally highly effective, they contributed to forming a professional habitus that contradicted the relational core of early childhood practice.

Internationally, the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC; 1990) issued position statements on developmentally appropriate practices that have been widely discussed in the literature. In its latest statement, the relational core of early childhood practice delineated expectations of warm, positive interactions; respect

for and by stakeholders; supportive, collaborative relationships with children, colleagues, and parents; high outcomes for children; engagement in continuous development and learning through play; and regularity and punctuality on the job, among other characteristics (Copple & Bredekamp, 2013). Kramer (2003) found that early childhood teachers must focus on the critical elements of attitude, behavior, and the communication of ethical actions based on an explicit or implicit code of conduct. These findings were supported by Krishnaveni and Anitha (2008) who found that this code of conduct demanded early educators to possess certain standard skills and competencies that enhanced performance and achievement in their profession. Phelps (2006) found that when early childhood teachers committed to three key values of responsibility, respect, and risk taking, professionalism improved. However, the government's mandates for teacher performance and professionalism and the National Standards for Regulating the Provision of ECCE Services, Section 2 (2005b) do not embrace risk taking as an attribute of teacher professionalism.

Generally, federal mandates support possessing a body of specialized knowledge and acting in highly prescribed ways. However, they do not explicitly emphasize or support certain core, developmentally appropriate practices. Those core practices that were valued by early childhood professionals and include providing enriching, real life, meaningful experiences for young children. The practitioners viewed those practices as fundamental to working in the early childhood field (Brock, 2012; Oberhuemer, 2005; Phelps, 2006; Urban, 2008; Weems, 2003).

Lacking in the literature are sufficient practitioner voices and perspectives across different contexts and cultures. In this study, I provided a medium for their voices and brought practitioners together for a historic collaborative dialogue to generate change in current practices and service provisions. The results of this study also articulated a more appropriate and realistic vision for continued professional development in ECCE. My problem statement built upon previous research findings focusing on studies conducted within the last 5 years that attested to the dearth of practitioner voices in debates of teacher professionalism in the early childhood sector. In this study, I explored and described conceptions of teacher professionalism in early childhood education by answering four research questions.

The term teacher professionalism has different meanings to different people and often takes on new meanings in different contexts (Creasy, 2015). Demirkasimoglu (2010) perceived teacher professionalism as an ideological construct used for occupational control of teachers. Phelps (2006) identified the term as the best and highest standards for teachers and concluded that teacher professionalism meant meeting certain standards in education as it is related to proficiency. To Urban (2008), teacher professionalism in early childhood is viewed as professional habitus, knowledge, evidence-based practice, hermeneutics, and critical thinking. Those elements are difficult to achieve and sustain if the system does not provide supporting mechanisms. Castle (2009) advanced a meaning of teacher professionalism as acting according to agreed standards or ethical codes. Castle cited Bergen's (1992) support for that view, which stated that professional people were expected to adopt and enact characteristics common

to the group of professionals to which the term was reserved. Those variations in meaning preclude formulation of a universal definition of teacher professionalism in ECCE (Creasy, 2015).

Differing views and meanings of teacher professionalism have been compounded by government mandates for increased professionalism, policymakers' conception of teacher professionalism, teachers' and society's perception of professionalism, teachers' interpretation of government mandates, and the socio-political contexts in which teachers operate (Campbell-Barr & Bogatic, 2017; Holloway & Brass, 2018; Moore & Clark, 2016; Taggart, 2016). This is further mitigated by the unique meaning of teacher professionalism in the early childhood sector and its diverse contexts (Moss, 2015; Perryman, Ball, Braun, & Maguire, 2017; Tukonic & Harwood, 2015). To early childhood practitioners, professionalism meant being trained in the field; possessing and acting upon a core body of knowledge grounded in child development principles; engaging in developmentally appropriate practices of which cultural appropriateness was key; and investing emotionally in the children, families, and communities they serve (Moss, 2015; Oberhuemer, 2014; Taggart, 2016; Urban, 2014).

Six major constructs stood out from the literature. First, the term professionalism is conceived of differently based on individual's perspectives and their cultural, societal, historical, and political contexts (Moss et al., 2016; Oberhuemer, 2014; Sachs, 2016). This suggests that meanings of professionalism found in the literature may not be in sync with meanings of professionalism held in Trinidad and Tobago and other contexts. In fact, the literature spoke to the difficulty of arriving at a universal definition of the term

(Creasy, 2015; Sachs, 2016; Urban & Swadener, 2016). Second, several studies provided a rationale of quality as the catalyst driving government mandates for increased professionalism; conceptions of quality seem synonymous with excellence in practitioners' performance and children's attainment of high outcomes (Elwick, Osgood, Robertson, Sakr, & Wilson, 2017; Hui, Yeung, & Ng 2017; Hunkin, 2018; Logan, 2017; Moss et al., 2016; Reetu, Renu, & Asarsh, 2017).

Third, the literature reported the positive impacts of government mandates in terms of providing standards as guidelines for practice (Demirkasimoglu, 2010; Miller, 2008; Simpson, 2010b); a career lattice for upward mobility in the field (Brennan, 2011; Miller, 2008; Osgood, 2010; Simpson, 2010a); delineated education and certification for remunerations commensurate with qualifications (Grey, 2011; Moss, 2010, 2014; Simpson, 2010a; Taggart, 2016); and as benchmarks for accountability (Brennan, 2011; Grey, 2011; Laight, 2011; Moss, 2010, 2015; Robson & Fumoto, 2009; Taggart, 2016). Fourth, conversely, negative impacts of government mandates were also discussed, including professionalism as defined in government mandates was based on neoliberal, masculinist views (Ball, 2016; Connell, 2013; De Lissovoy, 2018; Douglass & Gittell, 2011; McGillivray, 2012; Osgood, 2012) and was focused on accountability and assessment and ignored the relational core of working with young children (Brock, 2012; Hui et al., 2017; Taggart, 2016; Urban, 2014) and curriculum derived from mandates were prescriptive and developmentally inappropriate for young children and marginalized minority groups including first nation peoples (Castello & Castello, 2016; Moss et al., 2014; Sparapani & Perez, 2015; Urban, 2014).

Fifth, the literature presented alternative conceptions of professionalism in early childhood in terms of valuing and respecting the *emotional labor* of early childhood practitioners, and the ethic of care which drove their work as similar to professional interpretations of the caring, warmth, and compassion in doctors' work, social workers, and those in theology (Brock, 2012; Grey, 2011; Islam, 2010; McGillivray, 2012; Osgood, 2010; Taggart, 2016). The need for government and policymakers to collaborate with practitioners to restructure early childhood services (ECS) and provisions, thereby reflecting practitioners' voices and addressing troubling issues extant to their work and in mandates, was also expressed (Brock, 2012; Giovacco-Johnson, 2011; Grey, 2011; Jones & Osgood, 2007; Lloyd & Hallet, 2010; Peeters, 2010; Phelan, 2010; Urban, 2014).

Finally, the importance of having a code of ethical conduct that guided decisions and enactments in any professional field was discussed (O'Neill & Bourke, 2010; Simpson, 2010a; Taggart, 2012; 2016). The specific, robust, humane, and disciplined nature of such ethical codes and their benefits should not be understated. They spoke to the flexible nature of practitioners' work and the constant need for changing what they did to meet the diverse, developmental needs of the children and families served (Dubovicki & Jukic, 2017; Johnson, 2011; Kinkead-Clark, 2017; Millei & Gallagher, 2017; Taggart, 2016; Thomas, 2011; Urban 2014). The code of ethical conduct guiding work in early childhood spoke to the necessity of practitioners reflecting daily on their practice and making changes to better meet clients' needs (Dubovicki & Jukic, 2017; Giovacco-Johnson, 2011; McGillivray, 2012; Taggart, 2016;).

In this study, I addressed gaps in knowledge in the discipline regarding the meaning of professionalism to practitioners. I addressed internal issues regarding how early childhood practitioners defined professionalism, how they enacted or displayed their professionalism in classrooms. Also, I addressed external issues like the impacts of government mandates on their professionalism, and how practitioners responded to government mandates for increased professionalism. Additionally, how government mandates have been implemented in Trinidad and Tobago's ECCE sector was discovered.

This study was needed for several reasons. One reason was that the impact of those diverse meanings and conceptualizations of ECCE had not been studied in a developing country like Trinidad and Tobago. Another reason was that early educators in Trinidad and Tobago had not been offered opportunities to voice their concerns about government mandates and how their work with young children is impacted. Early educators in Trinidad and Tobago are seen as public servants, there to do the biddings of parents, policymakers, and society and not as professionals with specialized knowledge about what is best for young children's growth, development, and learning. They are not expected to talk back or to have an opinion. This study also provided an avenue for early educators to make their voices and opinions heard, to engage in dialogue about their professionalism and how it is impacted by government mandates, and how they could improve the quality of ECCE offered to the nation's children.

An additional reason this study was needed was that few researchers have investigated the impact of government mandates on early childhood practitioners working

with children aged 3 to 5 years old in developing countries. Specifically, insufficient knowledge in the discipline has been gathered in Trinidad and Tobago and the Caribbean region as a whole. In addition to filling the gaps in knowledge in this discipline, the results of this study located in a developing country made an important contribution by adding to the diversity of educational viewpoints on professionalism in early childhood. The findings of this study can be used to chart paths to successful implementation of government mandates in early childhood education for developing countries.

Problem Statement

The trend towards school accountability has impacted early childhood practices worldwide (Campbell-Barr & Bogatic, 2017; Holloway & Brass, 2018; Millei, Gobby, & Gallagher, 2017). As calls for educational accountability grew, lawmakers have emphasized the need for increased professionalism in teaching (Dubovicki & Jukic, 2017; Viskovic & Visnjic-Jevtic, 2017; Vujcic & Camber-Tambolas, 2017). The application of government mandates had not been effective because of a discrepancy between policymakers' and educators' definitions of professionalism (Creasy, 2015; Demirkasimoglu, 2010; Sachs, 2016; Watson & Michael, 2016). Taggart (2016) noted that being a professional working with young children was not just about meeting standards; it was about attitude, ideology, and passion. However, these qualities are sometimes sublimated in an attempt to meet accountability demands (Moss, 2015).

My review of current literature from the United States, Australia, Europe, Finland, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom indicated that government and policymakers' conceptions of professionalism and teacher professionalism as articulated

in official documents vary from and do not include early educators' conceptions of their professionalism. This was especially true in relation to what early educators did with young children; how they performed in their daily work contexts; and the crucially affective, relational core that was innately embedded in working with young children and their families (Logan, 2017; Moore & Clarke, 2016; Reetu et al., 2017; Taggart, 2016). Additionally, the literature presented three perspectives of professionalism in early childhood education: (a) acting in accordance with standards and regulations that specify ways to improve outcomes for children (Costello & Costello, 2016), (b) utilizing specialized training gained from professional education implemented by government standards of assessment and accountability (Moore & Clarke, 2016; Watson & Michael, 2016), and (c) using their specialized knowledge and skills to make decisions about what was best for children in each particular context, through caring and collaborative partnerships with families and colleagues (Creasy, 2015; Trodd & Dickenson, 2018). The latter view implies flexibility, creativity, passion, and professional autonomy, which Campbell-Barr, Georgeson, and Varga (2015) and Taggart (2016) claimed official standards and regulations viewed as unprofessional.

Absent from the literature is the Trinidad and Tobago situation and context; yet, tension, dissonance, and great disparities exist in the national ECCE program (Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, 2011). Wide variety also exists in how early educators interpreted and implemented national standards for regulating the provisions of ECS and the draft national curriculum guide at their respective ECCE centers (Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, 2011). In Trinidad and

Tobago, professionalism in ECCE meant being trained and certified in the field and adhering with fidelity to government mandates, especially regarding the implementation of the terms and conditions delineated in the school code of conduct, standards document, and draft national curriculum guide (Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, 2007). From inception and dissemination, the latter of those official documents was intended for nationwide testing by practitioners both in public and private establishments and feedback provided to policymakers for consensus on modifications. To date, such piloting of the draft national curriculum guide had been ineffective (D. Khan, personal communication, May 2012).

To date, the Ministry of Education (MOE) had not devised an effective system of assessment and accountability and had not established an efficient system to sustain supportive monitoring and evaluating processes through which the national standards and curriculum guide could be institutionalized. I conducted this qualitative investigation of the phenomenon hoping to ignite and sustain practitioner dialogue about professionalism and explain how they worked in classrooms and responded to government mandates. The results of this study also contributed to literature on the change process related to successful implementation of government mandates, particularly in developing nations.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explain early childhood practitioners' perspectives of government mandates, particularly the implementation of the national standards and draft curriculum guide, and how those mandates impacted their personal and professional lives. The study was also designed to elicit their views about

improvements that could be made in the sector to address professionalism. Through this, a deeper understanding of practitioners' views of their professionalism and the differences between their perspectives and officials' conceptions of professionalism was obtained. The information provided can better promote an understanding of the diverse views of professionalism held by practitioners, and how they interpreted and implemented government mandates as well as demonstrated their professionalism.

Research Questions

I developed the following central research question and subquestions to guide this study:

What does the term *teacher professionalism* as defined in government mandates enshrined in the National Standards and Draft Curriculum Guide mean to early childhood practitioners?

The subquestions were:

1. In what ways did early childhood practitioners' definitions of professionalism differ from official definitions?
2. In the view of practitioners, how did government mandates impact professionalism and the personal lives of early childhood practitioners?
3. How did early childhood practitioners think those impacts should be addressed?

Conceptual Framework for the Study

Merriam (2009) advised qualitative researchers to review literature related to their topic of interest and note recurring concepts, models, and theories as well as the major

writers, theorists, and researchers to identify their theoretical framework. Merriam continued by stating that a researcher's own framework would draw upon those concepts, terms, definitions, models, and theories of that special literature base and disciplinary orientation. The researcher's derived framework would generate the problem of the study, specific research questions, data collection and analysis techniques, and how they would interpret the findings. Additionally, the literature would provide information regarding what was known about the topic by citing appropriate literature; what aspect of the topic the researcher was going to focus on; what was not known or the gap in the knowledge base, why it was important to know it; and the exact purpose of their study. Merriam (2009) cited Thornton's (1993) assertion that researchers' observations were framed in some ways rather than others, which made perception itself theory laden; theory allowed researchers to see what they would otherwise miss and helped them anticipate and make sense of events.

This interpretative and exploratory case study was underpinned by Fullan's (2007) change in practice theory and Senge's (1997) systems thinking theory, against a backdrop of effective elicitation of early childhood practitioners' thinking and voice. Those theories guided my interpretation and understanding of the data by providing the focus needed to enhance understanding and answer the research question and subquestions. For example, practitioners spoke about their practice and perspectives of professionalism and highlighted the changes in practice they needed to make individually and collectively to improve professionalism in the early childhood system. In doing this, practitioners thought of and analyzed the national ECCE system in specific reference to

the 3 to 5 year old sector. They shared perspectives on how the system could be improved; the support mechanisms needed to enhance practitioner professionalism and systemic changes needed for ongoing improvements, development, and sustainability.

Voice has been increasingly used by researchers to determine educators' thinking and has influenced the design of research conducted by Anning and Edwards (1999), Bennett et al. (1997), Day (1999), Moyles (2001), Moyles et al. (2002), and Nias (1989), who was the pioneer in eliciting teacher thinking. Fullan's (2007) logic that change must occur in practice, in terms of materials, teaching approaches, and beliefs, in order to affect outcomes aligns with Senge's (1997) perspectives on systemic thinking, purporting that whilst all people are capable of learning, the structures in which they function were often not conducive to reflection on their practice and engagement. Furthermore, Senge stated that in general, people lacked the tools and guiding ideas to make sense of the situations they faced and needed help to better understand and cope with their work context. Further discussion of these theories and related case studies will be provided in Chapter 2.

Nature of the Study

In this explanatory, qualitative, case study, I investigated early childhood practitioners' perspectives of professionalism, their views about their own professionalism, the government's definition of professionalism, and the impact of government mandates on their personal and professional lives through which they determined what needed to be done to improve professionalism in that sector. According to Creswell (2013), case study research is a qualitative approach through which

researchers explore a real life, contemporary, bounded system or multiple bounded systems over time. In case studies, detailed, indepth data collection involves multiple sources of information (e.g., observations, interviews, audiovisual materials, documents, and reports (Creswell, 2013).

These multiple forms of data enable researchers to present a case description and case themes. The unit of analysis might be multiple cases or a single case. The unit of analysis in this case study is Trinidad and Tobago's ECCE program. I conducted this intrinsic case study with a small group of 12 early childhood practitioners, who were recommended by the heads of early childhood departments at four teacher education institutions in Trinidad and Tobago. This case study was intrinsic because it illustrated a unique case that had unusual interest in and of itself and needed to be described in detail. Such a study has not been undertaken in a developing Caribbean economy like Trinidad and Tobago. Denzin and Lincoln (2005) opined that case study work is done by people who had intrinsic interest in the case to understand what is important about the case within its own world. Intrinsic designs develop perceptions of case-specific issues, contexts, and interpretations through its thick descriptions (Creswell, 2013).

The methodological approach I took in this study was eliciting practitioners' thinking and voice from their perspectives to determine their own understandings of their professionalism. I collected educators' accounts in their own words and terms through indepth, open ended, semistructured interviews, which, according to Clandinin (1986), represented the knowledge claim of the individual case (i.e., of what things were and how they worked in particular circumstances). Educators developed and sustained implicit

theories drawn from personal experiences, academic knowledge, beliefs, and values, and these systems of thought have not been clearly articulated by their owners (Brock, 2006). One objective of this study was for practitioners themselves to raise their interests and issues so that a better understanding of professionalism through their eyes could be obtained. Practitioners' stories of how their personal and professional lives have changed due to government mandates were elicited. Through researcher probing, practitioners explicitly articulated the depth and strength of their professional knowledge and work.

I used document analysis, content analysis, and discourse analysis to identify patterns and themes in official documents (see Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Maxwell, 2013; Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2002; Yin, 2009). Those key themes and terms were presented to practitioners to stimulate reflective dialogue and discussions and draw on their deeper reflections on their perceptions of professionalism, eliciting indepth thinking and articulation. To be successful, elicitation of practitioners' voices and thinking should occur in a supportive environment and a natural, real life setting, with later discussions to facilitate reflection and produce insight. My role as researcher was crucial to eliciting open responses and understanding the context from which those responses were drawn; therefore, knowledge of the field, respect, and interest in practitioners' work were important. Policy had not always acknowledged the professional knowledge or status of early childhood educators (ECEs); yet, how they perceived their professional roles was vital to how they operated as professionals.

According to Yin (2009), theory development is an essential part of the design phase in case studies. The ideas stated by participants covered the questions,

propositions, units of analysis, logic connecting data to proposition, and criteria for interpreting the findings; thus, the entire research design embodied a theory of the phenomenon being studied. Yin posited that researchers should have a simple goal of attaining a sufficient blueprint for their study, and this required a declaration of their theoretical propositions. Yin cited Sutton's and Staw's (1995) statement regarding theory as a hypothetical story about why acts, events, structure, and thoughts occurred and emphasizing that the entire research design provided strong guidance determining what data to collect and the strategies through which the data should be analyzed. To support this view, Yin advocated reviewing specific case studies, which had been successfully completed, to fully understand how theory is used in case studies.

Accordingly, Creswell (2013) made reference to Denzin and Lincoln's (2013) consideration that philosophical assumptions are embedded within the interpretative frameworks that qualitative researchers used for conducting studies. Those authors stated that they wanted a social science committed up front to issues of social justice, equity, nonviolence, peace, and universal human rights. In some qualitative studies, philosophical assumptions could be deduced by the multiple views that appeared in themes; the detailed offering of subjective quotes of participants; the carefully declared bias of the researcher; or the emerging design, which evolved from the abstract, from descriptions to themes to broad generalizations (see Creswell, 2013). This case study demonstrated those principles underpinned by the views of Fullan (2007) on change in practice and Senge (1997) on systems thinking.

I also incorporated interpretative and exploratory methodologies in this case study, which highlighted the interests and issues practitioners raised during face to face, semistructured interviews and focus group meetings. Other sources of data were official documents such as the National Policy on Early Childhood Care and Education (2005b), Draft National Early Childhood Curriculum Guide (2006), School Code of Conduct (2009), practitioners' lesson plans and reflections, and my notes and memos. These multiple sources of data were analyzed using in-vivo, value, and emotion codes for practitioners' discourse and document analysis for official documents, notes, and memos. Triangulation across data sets were validated using the Nvivo software application. Yin (2009) purported that a case study design is well suited to situations in which it was impossible to separate the phenomenon from their context. Yin reiterated this by stating that a case study was preferred for examining contemporary events, but when the relevant behaviors could not be manipulated, the unique strength of the case study is its ability to deal with a full variety of evidence.

Merriam (2009) highlighted special features of case studies which made the design the most suitable choice for this investigation: (a) the particularistic nature, meaning that there is specificity of focus, that made the design good for practical problems, questions, situations, or puzzling occurrences arising from everyday practice; (b) the descriptive results, meaning the end produce is rich, thick descriptions of the phenomenon under study, thus labeling case studies as holistic, lifelike, grounded, and exploratory; and (c) the heuristic nature, meaning that case studies illuminate the reader's understanding of the phenomenon under study. To emphasize this point, Merriam cited

Stake (1981), who stated that previously unknown relationships and variables could be expected to emerge from case studies, which lead to a rethinking of the phenomenon as well as generating new insights into how things got to be the way they were.

Stake (1981) called the data interpreting process *naturalistic generalization* because a case study provides vicarious instances and episodes that merged with existing experiences. The author posited that qualitative case studies are valued for their ability to capture complex actions, perceptions, and interpretations. Case study reports provide vignettes and narratives that feed into the naturalistic generalizations of readers and writers; therefore, case study knowledge is more concrete, contextual, developed by reader interpretation, and is based more on reference populations determined by the reader (see Merriam, 2009).

Definitions

In this section, I provide general definitions of key terms used in the study. Some definitions are paraphrased according to early childhood literature, whereas other definitions are specific to Trinidad and Tobago's early childhood sector. The definitions were supplied to provide clarification on how each term is applied in the context of Trinidad and Tobago, which was the case studied. These definitions also enhance understanding of the case parameters and boundaries.

Early childhood care and education (ECCE): A range of specific care and education services and programs offered to young children and their families from birth to age 8 years old through holistic curriculum approaches and in partnership with families and communities (Gordon & Browne, 2017). In Trinidad and Tobago, ECCE spans three

distinct age ranges: (a) birth to 3 years old, inclusive of infancy and toddlerhood, the early years of life, (b) 3 to 5 years old, the early childhood period, rapid growth, and development of the young child; and (c) 5 to 8 years old, entry into the formal education system and the period before middle childhood (Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, 2005).

Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) center: Government or privately owned and operated establishments that provide early childhood education services and programs to children aged 3 to 5 years old and their families (Gordon & Browne, 2017). While the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago (2005) views those as all facilities providing learning support, care and development services to children from 3 years old to children under 6 years of age.

Early childhood educator (ECE): People who work as teachers in early childhood settings like nurseries, childcare homes, 3 to 5 year old ECCE centers, and the early classrooms first year to Standard 2 in the primary school (Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, 2005).

Early childhood services (ECS): All settings offering informal programs to children under 6 years old, including day care centers, preschools, kindergartens, ECCE centers, and nurseries (Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, 2005).

Early Childhood Division: In 1995, the existing Preschool Unit of the MOE was converted to a division of the MOE. The new division comprised of five departments and a full cadre of administrative and clerical staff, including a director and deputy director,

curriculum facilitators, quality assurance officers, health officers, and supervisors (Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, 1996).

Early childhood practitioner: People who work within the early childhood field at different levels, performing different functions in diverse settings ranging from early childhood classrooms, nurseries, child care homes, preschools, kindergartens, primary schools up to and inclusive of Standard 2 or age 8 years old; teacher educators at tertiary education institutions responsible for the training of early educators; administrators of programs; and government officials charged with overseeing the national ECCE program (Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, 2005).

Preschool School: Used interchangeably with ECCE center in reference to whole day or half day facilities, government or privately owned, which provided ECSs and experiences geared towards the holistic development of children aged 3 to 5 years old (Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, 2005).

Preschool Unit: A special unit of the MOE, created in 1970, with the responsibility for the planning, establishing, monitoring, and supervising ECCE centers and programs nationwide (Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, 1968).

Primary school: Seven year elementary institutions which cater to the academic achievement of children from ages 5 to 12 years old or older through a curriculum comprising of the traditional subject content, including the visual and performing arts, physical education, societal and cultural events, and health and family life education (Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, 1992).

Professionalism in early childhood: A situated concept, embedded, like the understanding of children and childhood, within specific historical, sociocultural, organizational, economic, and political contexts (Oberhuemer, 2008).

Professionalism: “The competence or skill expected of a professional; in early childhood education, this includes a sense of identity, purpose to engage in developmentally appropriate practices, a commitment to ethical teaching and to child advocacy, and participation in the work as a legitimate livelihood” (Gordon & Browne, 2017, p. 647). Whereas, Hargreaves and Goodson (1996) defined this term as the quality and character of people’s actions within a group.

Professional: A person who promotes high standards for themselves, their colleagues, and their students. They are continually improving and expanding their skills and knowledge; they are multidimensional people (Morrison, 2015).

Profession: A community of practice that exhibits command of a specialist body of knowledge, sets standards for practitioners, and regulates its own standards of practice (Morrison, 2015).

Professionalization of a sector: The process through which leading workforce members achieved professional status and other roles and qualifications were defined in relation to them. It is something that normally evolves over an extended period of time (Hevey, 2010).

Secondary Entrance Examination (SEA): A standardized, summative assessment administered to all children 12 years old or older upon completion of the 7 year primary

school syllabus to be deemed eligible for entry into a secondary school (Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, 2005).

Service Volunteered to All (SERVOL): A local, nongovernmental organization established by a Catholic priest in 1970 to volunteer service to low income communities to enhance their quality of life. SERVOL established many ECCE centers in Trinidad and Tobago and was the first to embark upon the training of people working with young children (Pantin, 1979).

Social, Physical, Intellectual, Creative, Emotional, and Spiritual (SPICES): The curriculum approach devised by SERVOL to foster the holistic development of young children attending their ECCE centers (Pantin, 1979).

Systems thinking: A framework for seeing interrelationships rather than things, for seeing patterns of change rather than static “snapshots” (Senge, 1990).

Teachers colleges: Institutions established by government and other parties for the education and training of persons desirous of becoming teachers (Campbell, 1987).

Teacher educator: Persons working at tertiary level institutions involved with teacher education programs with specialization in early childhood and other areas (Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, 2005).

Teacher professionalism: The degree of fidelity, ethics, consistency, and competence with which a teacher performs all aspects of his/her duties in the teaching arena (Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, 2005).

Ministry of Education (MOE): The governmental body responsible for the development, delivery, monitoring, and evaluation of the three tiered (i.e., ECCE, primary, and secondary) national education system of Trinidad and Tobago (Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, 1980).

The Task Force: A government commissioned and appointed body charged with reviewing the education system and making recommendations for improvements (Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, 1968).

University of the West Indies/School of Continuing Studies (UWI/SOCS): The SOCS was the then extramural arm of the UWI, which became involved in the training of ECEs at certificate level together with SERVOL on the harmonized program that was developed out of the findings from the Early Childhood Survey conducted by the High/Scope Research Foundation, in 1995 (Fergus, Bernard, & Soares, 2007).

Assumptions

Thirty five years of working in the service of young children and their families at the levels of early childhood teacher, program leader, curriculum developer, and teacher training and supervision have informed my general view of ECEs. I see chronic apathy pervading the sector, which eroded early educators' passion, enthusiasm, resilience, compassion, opportunities for life long learning, and engagement in empowering discourse. Many early educators are yet to articulate their professionalism and what they value. In some cases, their passivity has led to inappropriate interactions with young children and their families, which further affirmed society's negative view of them. Popular media is quick to report any infraction and is a willing ear to anyone with a

complaint; yet, some early educators are not mindful of this trend. Few early educators reflected on their practice, and few applied their theoretical knowledge base to what they did in classrooms. There is a gap between what prospective early educators did in classrooms during in training, especially in teaching practice and actual practice in classrooms when they reenter the system (V. Cropper, personal communication, February 2013; H. A. De Peza, personal communication, September 2013).

According to Maxwell (2013), a researcher's decisions are not free choice but are based upon assumptions about the world, the topic, and personal understanding of these. Maxwell intimated that researchers need to be aware of the assumptions they hold about reality and how they understood the concepts they studied because these have implications for the conclusions drawn. The author continued by stating that researchers need to examine which paradigmatic view aligns best with their assumptions and methodological preferences and should also consider the insights and approaches their views lent to the study. One of my assumptions about professionalism in Trinidad and Tobago's early childhood sector was that though some practitioners were informed, most were still novices who needed to work harder at becoming professionals. This meant that practitioners needed to seek ongoing professional development and education, and consistently apply principles of child development to their practice; engage in reflective, flexible practice relative to their individual contexts; articulate beliefs, values, and inappropriate expectations and behaviors; lobby for inclusion in the discourse on professionalism and in decision making; and where practical, apply government mandates suitable to the settings in which they operate.

Scope and Delimitations

In this study, I collected the views and artifacts of a small group of 12 early childhood practitioners to explore their perspectives of professionalism, government mandates, and how mandates impacted professionalism in the early childhood sector. The participants raised issues of individual importance, spoke to how those impacted their work and life, and shared ideas of how improvements could be arrived at in the field. Dialogue and collaboration was forged between practitioners who do not get opportunities to talk about their work and the challenges they experienced. Through dialogue, participants illuminated their view on professionalism in ECCE and the benefits, challenges, and concerns they encountered with government mandates as well as provided perspectives on how professionalism in the nation's ECCE program serving 3 to 5 year olds can be improved.

I selected this focus because the literature called for practitioners' voices to be heard in the growing debate about professionalism in early childhood. Particularly in Trinidad and Tobago, early childhood practitioners have no voice. They were not consulted when reforms were being discussed and designed. They had no input and were called to meetings at which mandates were handed down and told what was expected from that point onwards. Early educators were told, to make it easier and to assist them in implementation, the MOE had planned a series of training workshops in each educational district, which they attended on the days specified (V. Cropper, personal conversation, February 2013).

Early childhood practitioners working in classrooms of the national ECCE program, specifically those working with young children 3 to 5 year olds attending ECCE centers, were involved in this study. The sample comprised of practitioners from both private and government owned and operated ECCE centers. Early childhood practitioners working within the 5 to 8 year old and the zero to 3 year old sectors were not included. I did not investigate concepts of the formation of professional identity, perceptions and development of teacher self efficacy as related to teacher professionalism, and other constructs such as dimensions of professionalism. My focus was on practitioners' views of their professionalism and how government mandates impacted their professionalism. The findings, therefore, are directly applicable only to persons working with 3 to 5 year olds in Trinidad and Tobago. However, the rich, detailed description of the methodology that I provided can be used to determine whether the findings might be applicable to a different situation.

Theories relevant to teacher professionalism: such as Fullan and Brown's (1975) developmental stage theory through which concerns, problems, or teacher tasks common at various times in their professional lives are identified to facilitate expert provision of appropriate knowledge to teachers at each stage to enhance their professional development (Goodson & Hargreaves, 1996); as well as lay theories in which teacher beliefs that develop naturally over time without training or instruction (Holt-Reynolds, 1992); represent tacit knowledge lying dormant and unexamined by student teachers (Barclay & Wellman, 1986) developed over many years of observation of and participation in classrooms (Lortie, 1975); and in teaching/learning incidents taking place

in schools, homes, and the wider community (Measor, 1985; Sikes, 1987), but based on untaught interpretations of personal, lived experiences (Holt-Reynolds, 1992) were not used in this exploration. Because lay theories were more suitable for studies involving factors influencing the professional development of novice or beginning teachers. Lay theories, therefore, were inappropriate for this case study because participants were mature practitioners who had been working with 3 to 5 year olds for 10 years and more.

Although Durkheim's (1992) theory of professions as constituting a balance between central authority/state power and the development of civic morals by citizens/individuals, through which democracy could be maintained and developed, and especially the tensions between the professions' demands for autonomy and the tasks assigned to them by the state, which globally have become increasingly conflict ridden (Goodson & Hargreaves, 1996), was a useful idea for this investigation. I opted for the theories of Fullan (2007) and Senge (1990) to provide the guiding framework for exploring professionalism in Trinidad and Tobago's early childhood sector. My reason being early childhood practitioners' past encounters with those theories during teacher education programs, and that such familiarity enhancing comfort, comprehension of the intent of the study, and participation in the research project.

The scope of the study was limited to early educators' responses to government mandates for increased professionalism and justified by interviewing 12 early educators who worked with children 3 to 5 years old. The findings of this study cannot be generalized to any other group of early educators, for example, those working with children birth to 3 years, and 5 to 8 year olds. Participants in this study were purposively

sampled and asked open ended interview questions that facilitated attention only to issues of important. Those may not be important for or shared by nonsampled early educators. The limited time frame within which this study was conducted and my limited finances did not allow for more extensive investigation of the phenomenon beyond educators who serve the 3 to 5 year old population.

Limitations

This case study was bounded by time, a 10 month duration, and by case, Trinidad and Tobago (see Creswell, 2013). It was limited to the professional and personal experiences of a small group of 12 early childhood practitioners working within the 3 to 5 year old sector. Since it is confined to this small slice of the early childhood field, no generalizations to other sectors and contexts can be made. Its breadth was bounded, focused, and limited. The Trinidad and Tobago early childhood fraternity is small and closely knit; practitioners know each other personally or of each other's work professionally. My familiarity with most participants, knowledge of the local early childhood landscape, and strong beliefs about teacher professionalism may have challenged some participants and caused my biases and assumptions to surface. Therefore, I worked assiduously at restraining my feelings, thoughts, and assumptions to make each participant comfortable and relaxed, for open sharing of experiences.

Only participants who were no longer involved with me in a supervisory capacity were engaged in this study. I addressed and minimized the limitations by the conceptual framework of the study of eliciting practitioners' voices and by triangulating the data to

mitigate the effects of possible researcher bias. Since a small, stratified sample of practitioners working only with children 3 to 5 years old was used, the views of parents, nursery workers, and primary school teachers were not included. Follow up studies need to be conducted with wider nets of stakeholders at other levels of the early childhood age range.

Data collection was driven by participants' availability and individual work schedules. The individual interviews were unencumbered; however, the focus group meetings needed synchronization of times and cooperation for effective use of the slim windows of availability. I worked within participants' time constraints; therefore, some aspects of the focus group meetings had to be adjusted to accommodate participants' needs. The recommended participants from the four teacher education institutions included fewer male early educator graduates. The inclusion of male practitioners' views on teacher professionalism and responses to the interview questions contributed to deeper understanding of the issues. In a female dominated field, which has hardly articulated its professionalism and values, the male perspective added new insight to and served as a catalyst for discourse. .

It is my professional opinion that Trinidad and Tobago's early childhood sector is ready to implode. It is reaching out, looking for empathetic, professional guidance and direction. Early educators are demoralized and oppressed, simply going through ancient rituals regardless of the educative value, meaningfulness, or lack thereof to the young children served. I conducted this study to explore the validity of those assumptions and to determine what would give rise to these assumptions. Through this scientific approach,

practitioners were engaged in clarifying those assumptions and highlighted personal experiences of what was happening in the ECCE sector. This study provided an ideal opportunity for my edification, understanding, and attaining better insight into the phenomenon.

Significance

This study is significant because I engaged ECCE practitioners in Trinidad and Tobago in dialogue about teacher professionalism in the sector in terms of the disparity that existed between definitions and conceptualizations of professionalism in official documents and government mandates, and that was held by early childhood practitioners themselves. Practitioners' perspectives on the expectations and impact of government mandates on classroom practices in early childhood and professionalism was elicited to form the basis for later dialogue and collaboration to reflect practitioners' voices and realities. Through this inquiry, more realistic conceptions of teacher professionalism in ECCE in Trinidad and Tobago was generated. This information can be used to facilitate improvement in service provisions to the nation's children. The results of this study provided a springboard for further research as well as to building capacity, facilitating national development, and social change. Additionally, the findings of this study are positioned to fill the gap in the literature and continue the journey of documenting early childhood issues, processes, and solutions in developing economies with specific reference to Trinidad and Tobago, adding to the body of literature. Finally, the results of this study generated social change in terms of improving early childhood practitioners'

professionalism, enhancing collaboration between practitioners and other stakeholders, and improving service provisions and support from government officials.

Summary

Professionalism in ECCE has generated much debate among stakeholders around conceptualizations of the term and perceptions of how it looked in different contexts. Much of what is known about professionalism in ECCE has emanated from developed, first world countries. The literature pointed to similarities in issues, government policies, mandates, and work contexts; yet, no literature existed about professionalism in Trinidad and Tobago's early childhood sector. In this chapter, I presented a background to the study, including a brief overview of the development of ECCE in Trinidad and Tobago. To understand the unique reality in Trinidad and Tobago's context, early childhood practitioners were interviewed in this study to illuminate the issues, challenges, and ideas of how improvements could be realized.

In Chapter 2, I provide a synthesis of current research on professionalism in early childhood from the past 5 years. An explanation of the literature search strategy is provided to allow for replication of the study in other contexts. Conceptions of professionalism in early childhood found within the literature are categorized to provide a framework for the review of current literature and to replicate elicitation of practitioners' voices, perspectives, and issues.

These major constructs are outlined in greater detail in Chapter 2. The alignment of those constructs within the conceptual framework of the study demonstrates how change was generated. According to Fullan's (2007) change in practice theory and

Senge's (1997) system thinking theory, enhanced and strengthened practitioner modes of thinking, learning, and development were explored in this case study. Such practice is recommended by Senge for simultaneous organizational, systemic, and human capital growth. This approach is justified by Stake's (1995) use of the Greek word *theta* as representing the case that was bounded and possesses working parts; it is an integrated system, albeit with dysfunctional parts. The review of general literature on professionalism is followed by a summary of studies into teachers' responses to government mandates in early childhood; case study methods used in the literature reviewed; a discussion of the three government documents in Trinidad and Tobago that outlined ECCE and views of teacher professionalism therein; and the history and development of ECCE in Trinidad and Tobago. Chapter 2 concludes with a summary of the main points.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

The research problem in this dissertation study was the lack of understanding of the impact of government mandates on ECCE. The purpose of the study was to explore and understand early educators' response to government mandates for increased professionalism in Trinidad and Tobago's early childhood sector. Therefore, this literature review is organized around six topics. The first topic is conceptions of professionalism. Several studies stated that the term professionalism is much contested and debated and that a universal definition of the term had not been reached, leading to spin-off effects (Colmer, 2017; Creasy, 2015; Oberhuemer, 2018; Oberhuemer & Schreyer, 2017; Tukonic & Harwood, 2015; Urban 2015). The second topic is related to quality, or the need to improve early childhood services and provision to meet accountability demands (Campbell-Barr, 2017; Johnson, 2015; Toril, Fox, & Cloney, 2017) because this was the rationale for government mandates for increased professionalism in the sector. With the third topic, I address how government mandates positively impacted professionalism in ECE (see Peeters, 2017; Sims, 2014; Wingrave & Mc Mahon, 2016). This differed from the fourth topic, the negative impacts experienced by the international community (Cherrington & Thornton, 2015; Everiss, Hill, & Meade, 2017; Hunkin, 2016; Kilderry, 2015; Oberhuemer, 2014; 2018). On the fifth topic, I present alternative conceptions or new ways of thinking about professionalism in early childhood (Everiss et al., 2017; Lightfoot & Frost, 2015; Mitchell, 2014; Monk & Phillipson, 2017). Finally, the sixth topic speaks to the critical importance of having a

code of ethics to enhance accountability, responsibility, and guide practice in the field (Solvason, 2017).

When I examined current literature on teacher professionalism in ECCE, more complex perspectives of teacher professionalism and paradoxes emerged. To develop an understanding of early childhood practitioners' responses to government mandates for increased professionalism, several areas needed to be addressed in the literature review. From these areas, the search terms *professionalism*, *early childhood education*, and *federal mandates* were used as broad categories for the primary literature search. The first was an exploration of current literature on professionalism in early childhood education. Several key researchers were discovered (i.e., Brock, 2012; Dalli, 2008; Douglass & Gittell, 2012; Karila, 2008; Miller, 2008; Moloney, 2010a; Moss, 2010; Oberhuemer, 2008; Osgood, 2010; Simpson, 2010b; Taggart, 2016; Urban, 2008; Woodrow, 2008), and their studies all spanned the early childhood years from birth to 8 years old. Relatively few studies addressed the 3 to 5 year old age groups specifically, and there was no literature about the Trinidad and Tobago context. Once this gap was identified, I expanded the search to include other terms such as *teacher quality*, *quality early education*, *federal policy*, and *teacher professional development*.

In this chapter, I provide information about how the literature was accessed and the search strategies and limiters employed to acquire peer reviewed research articles of high academic rigor that were suitable for the study. This is followed by a review of the literature according to the six constructs mentioned earlier in this section; a summary of studies about teachers' responses to government mandates; a section with discussion of

case studies related to this study; another with an outline of studies with similar conceptual frameworks; and ending with a summary in which I wrap up the key findings, identify the gaps in the literature, and briefly speak to how the results of this study filled those gaps.

Literature Search Strategy

I used several databases and resources to compile a literature review consisting of both digital assets and printed material published in the past 5 years. Walden University's Thoreau Library portal served as one gateway for accessing Academic Search Complete, ERIC, Education Resource Complete, SAGE, ProQuest, the Dissertation and Theses databases, and the Thoreau Multiple Databases tool. Google Scholar was used in addition to those databases to cross reference articles and search for more current literature. I also used my local libraries to locate online and printed journals, texts, and articles pertaining to professionalism in ECCE, specifically searching *Early Childhood Quarterly*, *ERIC Digest*, *Early Childhood Research*, *Early Childhood Education*, and the Taylor, Francis/Routledge Group for free, academically rigorous articles. To establish and maintain academic rigor in the literature review, all articles were limited to those refereed or peer reviewed. Dawidowicz (2010) advised that researchers needed to craft a series of questions to find relevant articles and sufficiently narrow the topic. My search for literature was designed with the research questions, the global landscape, and specifically the Caribbean region as core criteria.

During the literature search process, it was necessary to revise search terms and limiters to find current articles. My initial search using the broadest search term *early*

childhood education published from 2009 to 2012, yielded 16,213 articles, inputting the term *professionalism* resulted in 603 full text articles. From this pool, 68 articles were located. Unfortunately, I did not have access to 43 crucial articles from the Taylor Francis/Routledge Group. I sought help from the Walden librarians who also could not access free copies. I was advised to purchase the articles I felt were most crucial to my study; therefore, I purchased 12 articles from the Taylor Francis/Routledge Group, and was then in possession of 37 articles. The terms, *quality early childhood education*, *impact of federal mandates on early childhood*, and *early childhood research* resulted in 1,352 hits. Using limiters, like *3–5 age group*, *early educators' voices*, and *early educators' response to federal mandates*, 683 articles were returned. I could not access the majority of those articles because the costs ranged from US\$18.00 to US\$37.00 each. Only 15 articles were attained from this search.

My online searchers for scholarly articles resulted in hundreds of matches using the identical parameters stated previously. This search also yielded numerous partially related articles, which I needed to sort through to locate those with academic rigor that were accessible and most appropriate to my study. I discovered several relevant articles in the following academic journals: *Literacy Information and Computer Education Journal*, *Young Children*, and *European Journal of Education*. Other search terms were used in order to address the second and third research questions. I also searched for case studies and research on early educators' response to federal mandates for increased professionalism, but with no success. Many sources required a journal subscription of US\$50.00. When I searched the journal contents, only one article was somewhat related

to my study. I decided that was not the best way to spend sparse finances. A record of those articles and the URLs were taken for possible later access.

Conceptual Framework

Senge's (2006) systems thinking theory and Fullan's (2007) change in practice theory with a capacity building focus provided the foundation of the conceptual framework of this study. Since all human endeavors are systems bounded by separate, but interrelated actions, each individual affects, for better or worse, the functioning of the system (Senge, 1990). Because each individual is part of the system, intricately woven in it, and is unable to see the whole pattern of change; individuals focus on the part of the system intimately involved in (Senge, 2006). Systems thinking provided a body of knowledge and tools to make the whole pattern clearer; it helped everyone see how to effectively change the whole system. It is an appropriate framework for a study that seeks to generate systemic change.

The first of four tools in systems thinking is personal mastery, which enables people to clarify and deepen personal vision, focus energies, develop patience, and see reality objectively (Senge, 2006). The second, mental models, allows people to expose perceptions of the world and share those assumptions for peer critique. The third, building shared vision, is creating, sharing, and holding a picture of the type of future people want. The fourth, team learning, starts with dialogue and is the capacity of each member to put aside assumptions and engage in collective, sincere thinking (Senge, 2006).

According to Senge (2006), systems thinking is the fifth discipline that brings the four tools together in a pool of theory and practice. I selected Senge's theory to show

how a social system could create and sustain change, thereby strengthening individual capacity, forging team spirit and learning, and generating a collective shared vision for the future. In this way, the whole system or organization continues to learn and grow together. Because I addressed a gap in the literature in this study, using established theory illuminated how government mandates were potentially perceived and responded to by early childhood practitioners and the reverberating impact mandates had on the entire system.

According to Fullan (2007), the concept of change, whether real or perceived, always creates resistance to any educational reform, since real change involves changes in conceptions and behavior, it is usually difficult to achieve. Fullan intimated that educational change is a multidimensional process involving: possible use of new or revised materials; use of new teaching approaches; and alteration of beliefs. Fullan believed that change in practice should occur along those three dimensions, or it would not impact outcomes positively. Fullan recommended that when trying to change a culture, such as early childhood care and education in Trinidad and Tobago, one should adopt a capacity-building focus, by thinking of how to develop the innovative capacity of the organizations and systems involved, thus fostering continual improvement. The study's ultimate aim is to engage early childhood practitioners in thinking about how to generate and sustain change in practice across the entire system.

No study that combined Fullan's (2007) and Senge's (2006) theories as a framework for educational inquiry into teacher professionalism was found. The few studies that combined those theories investigated how change in educational reform was

implemented and coped with by teachers (Huda & Hussin, 2008; Salleh, 2008; Shaukat, 2013). Other studies applied either Fullan or Senge theories with other theorists to investigate: schools as learning organizations (Bui & Baruch, 2010; Dickson & Mitchell, 2014; Moli, 2010; Wong, Li, Choi, & Lee, 2008; Wong & Lee, 2011); developing and sustaining professional learning communities (Bynes, 2011; Kaminski, 2011; Morrow, 2010; Saunders, 2012; Williams, Brien, Sprague, & Sullivan, 2008); school leadership driving curriculum and educational change (Cook, 2009; Growe, 2011; Morrison & Cooper, 2009; Pranckuniene, Vildziuniene, Blandford, & Jackson, 2012; Stearns & Margulus, 2012); and in school teacher professional development (Koster & Dengerink, 2008). All those studies used a qualitative case study design. This study has advanced the literature and opened up avenues for further exploration of those combined theories in diverse educational research.

The two theories are compatible. Both advance foci on the whole rather than small pockets of the system, both are based upon continual, open dialogue between and active involvement of people at all levels of the system. Both theories validate and affirm people's thinking, agency, lofty ideals, and capabilities to achieve the desired future (Fullan, 2007 & Senge, 2006). Selection of those theories was automatic and driven by the study's problem, research questions and purpose; and by the fact that no one theory could fully account for the diversity inherent in any system, endeavor or social group. The voices of early childhood practitioners were crucial to understanding the impact of government mandates for increased professionalism in teachers' work, and the early childhood care and education system in Trinidad and Tobago. Journeying with

practitioners from subalternity to vocalization of the impacts (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005) of government mandates, is taking the first step towards creating personal, professional, organizational, and systemic social change.

The challenge of improving teacher professionalism in Trinidad and Tobago's ECCE sector was to enable practitioners to recognize the ontological reality, gain empowerment through dialogue, to think critically about professionalism, how it is viewed, and the personal and professional changes needed to make to move ECCE from what it is, to what it ought to be. Current official discourse regarded teacher professional from a neo-liberal market perspective that is diametrically opposed to my democratic, inclusive view of teacher professionalism as capacity building with moral purpose. Table 1 which follows, represented the current Trinidad and Tobago ECCE context, and my vision of what it should be.

Table 1

Opposing Views of ECCE in Trinidad and Tobago

ECCE In Trinidad and Tobago is: (Reality)	ECCE in Trinidad and Tobago ought to be: (Vision)
Neo-liberal, marketized, technical, mechanistic, student as object	Democratic, social justice, humanitarian, moral purpose
Elitist, maintaining the status quo, dominating	Student as subject, practical
Prescriptive curriculum, exclusive, Transmission of knowledge, behaviorist	Education for all, celebration of diversity, equity, equality
Accountability, responsibility	Emergent curriculum, inclusive, flexible
Standardizes tests	Transformative process, critical thinking, empowerment
	Ownership, agency
	Authentic/alternative assessment

To generate the movement I envisioned, practitioners needed to be engaged in dialogue about professionalism, the impact of government mandates, what occurred in

classrooms, what happened in the system, the personal and professional changes that were needed, how the system should change and why. This process transcended the current ontologically technical view of teaching in classrooms, to focus upon what is practical in our education system and pushed the boundaries further towards critically thinking about what teaching in ECCE should be. Figure 1, seen below is a diagrammatic representation of that transformative process. Consequently, practitioners thought critically beyond the classrooms and educational environment, to the wider socio-political system; thus, engaging in systems thinking through capacity building with moral purpose. This conceptualization provided a framework for interpreting practitioners' interview and focus group data. It tracked where practitioners were in practice and whether this research project was really engaging participants in thinking reflectively, critically about classroom practice, professionalism, and how the sector could be improved.

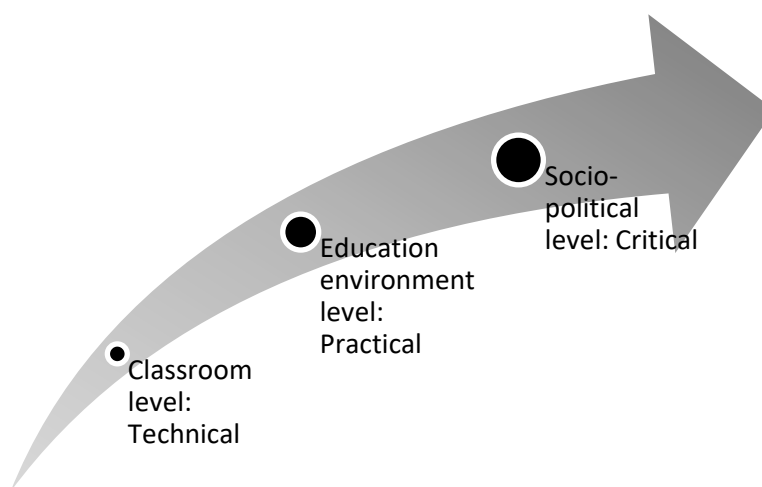


Figure 1. Upward process of practitioner critical thinking through capacity building.

The trilevel trajectory provided broad categorical codes for aggregation of data patterns and themes in the final phase of data analysis, which expressed as process in Figure 2, seen below, showed the framework through which discussions of the findings were organized.

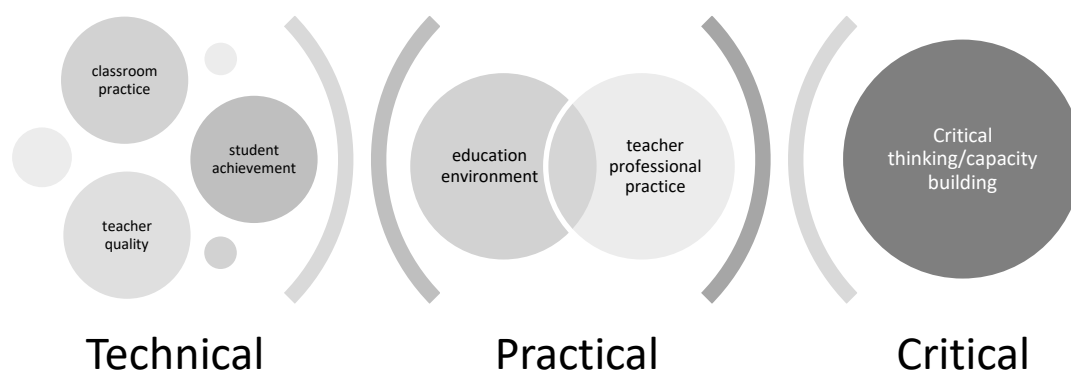


Figure 2. Process of integrated critical thinking on practice for capacity building.

Interview and focus group protocols were derived from application of combined principles of Fullan (2007) change in practice, and Senge (1990) systems thinking theories, in collaboration with expert reviewers. See those as appendices A, B, C, and D. Fullan's change in practice along the three dimensions for improved professionalism was integrated into the four stages of systems thinking to create a synergistic tool; represented by Figure 3. seen below framed interview and focus group questions which gathered rich data to answer the overarching research question, and three subquestions.

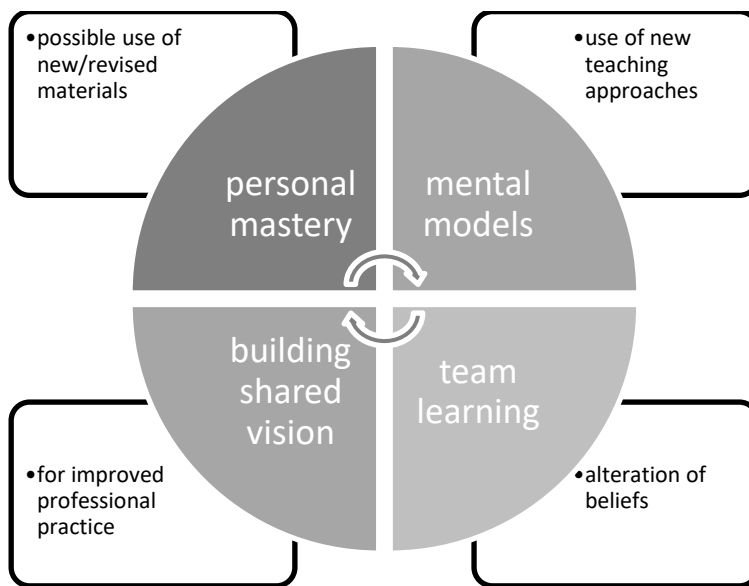


Figure 3. Conceptual framework driving interview and focus group protocols. I created this figure using graphics from *SmartArt, Windows 10*. The four outer windows represent dimensions of Fullan's (2007) theory of Change in Practice; while the inner circle represents dimensions of Senge's (1990) Systems' Thinking theory. Fullan, M. (2007). *The new meaning of educational change* (4th ed.). New York, NY: Teachers College Press. Senge, P., M. (1997). *The fifth discipline*. New York, NY: Currency Doubleday.

In the current literature reviewed, some researchers approached the problem of professionalism in early childhood from two perspectives: that of practitioners' response to and voice about the impact of government mandates; and document analysis of government policies and mandates handed down to practitioners. Most researchers in the discipline utilized the qualitative paradigm, some a mixed methods approach, whereas a few sought to quantify selected constructs. The quantitative aspects of some studies showed the number of government mandates and reforms generated in different countries over a ten year period (Brock, 2012; Dalli, 2008; Karila, 2008; Miller, 2008; Moloney 2010a; Osgood, 2010, 2012; Simpson, 2010b; Urban 2008); and that early childhood

practitioners resisted implementing mandates not understand or thought unsuitable for the children served (Bradbury, 2012; Osgood, 2016; Simpson 2010a; Taggart, 2016; Warren, 2013a, 2013b, 2014). Those studies illuminated practitioners' views about government mandates but did not shed light on the feelings and the impact mandates had on practitioners' personal and professional lives. The participants however, highlighted that fast paced mandates were handed down to early childhood practitioners, and were responded to or resisted in different ways by those professionals (Andrew, 2015; Bardbury, 2012; Chalke, 2013; Clark, 2012; Cook et al., 2013; Harwood, Klopper, Osanyin, & Vanderlee, 2012; Hordern, 2014, 2016; Skattebol, Adamson, & Woodrow, 2016).

In the qualitative studies where practitioners' voices were elicited through semi-structured interviews (Andrew, 2015; Sims, Forrest, Semann, & Slattery, 2015; Warrens, 2014), very few included other data sources, for example official documents, and practitioners' lesson plans and journals. When official documents were analyzed, the focus was upon the language in those documents, how early childhood practitioners were viewed therein, and conceptions of professionalism (Chalke, 2013; Tyler, 2011; Urban 2010; Woodrow, 2008). How professionalism was conceptualized in official discourses was another focus in some qualitative investigations that spoke to the differences between official, and practitioners' conceptions of professionalism. Those studies called for practitioners' voices to be included in the debate (Andrew, 2015; Brock, 2012; Dalli, 2008; Hordern, 2014, 2016; Karila, 2008; Kim, 2013; Miller, 2008; Osgood, 2009; Skattebol, Adamson, & Woodrow, 2016; Sims, Forrest, Semann, & Slattery, 2015;

Urban, 2008; Warren, 2013a, 2013b, 2014). Few studies engaged practitioners in discussions on the impact of those mandates. No qualitative study utilized the combined theories of Fullan (2007) and Senge (2006) to frame inquiry into professionalism in early childhood education.

Some studies focused on early childhood practitioners or nursery workers working with children birth to 2½ and 3 years old, others focused upon children in kindergarten settings, a few on elementary classrooms up to age 9, and some on the entire early childhood workforce speaking to the wide variance in qualifications, working conditions, salary, job security, and status. The lack of upward mobility through some systems, in particular countries like England and Australia was noted. No study focused specifically on early childhood practitioners working with the 3 to 5 age groups.

Consequently, based on the survey of current literature, this study investigated early childhood practitioners' response to government mandates for increased professionalism, with specific focus on those involved in the care and education of young children 3 to 5 years old. The practitioners' voices were elicited through semistructured interviews and focus group meetings. Official documents were analyzed and offered for discussion in focus groups to answer the research questions. This investigative approach was meaningful to the Trinidad and Tobago context because a better understanding of what pertained and was real in Trinidad and Tobago, was necessary before engaging practitioners in dialogue; to understand responses to government mandates for increased professionalism; early childhood practitioners' professionalism; and how practitioners

could improve professional practice. The six broad themes illuminated in the reviewed literature are outlined in the following section.

Literature Review Related to Key Concepts

Concepts of Professionalism

Five researchers presented significantly different views of professionalism in early childhood care and education. Those views were: One, professionalism is a situated concept, embedded like our understanding of children and childhood, within specific historical, socio-cultural, organizational, economic, and political contexts (Creasy, 2015; Fenech & Lotz, 2018; Moss, 2015; Oberhuemer, 2018). Two, professionalism is a multidimensional structure, including one's work behaviors and attitudes to perform at the highest standards, and improve service quality (Cansoy & Parlar, 2017; Creasy, 2015; Tanang & Abu, 2014; Tennhoff, Nentwich, & Vogt, 2015; Tukonic & Harwood, 2015). Three, professionalism is concerned with the dispositions and orientations of professional groups, and to individual professional's status and work (Cansoy & Parlar, 2017; Colmer, 2017; Cumming, Sumsion, & Wong, 2015; Lightfoot & Frost, 2015; Sachs, 2016). Four, professionalism is a multilevel, and multifaceted phenomenon, involving socio-cultural, national regulation and policy decision-making issues, and also is related to work communities, and the individuals within (Cansoy & Parlar, 2017; Colmer, 2017; Johnson, 2015; Lightfoot & Frost, 2015; Moore & Clarke, 2016; Sims & Pedey, 2015). In the fifth view, professionalism involves critical inquiry about teaching practice, but remained open and responsive to changing influences in context (Cansoy & Parlar, 2017; Colmer, 2017; Monk & Phillipson, 2017; Osgood, 2016; Peterson et al., 2016).

Bleach (2014) outlined two different perspectives of early year's professionalism (EYP), which reflected current debates about teacher professionalism in the United Kingdom. One involved conceptions that represented EYPs as socially constructed and determined; the other addressed those that represented EYPs as more active and reflexive agents in constructing professionalism. Warren (2014) interpreted professionalism as professional expertise and noted three interacting elements essential in the construction and development of professionalism. Those essential elements were, the personal dimension, domain-specific knowledge, and the working environment. Since that interaction is framed, and occurred within the cultural context of society, one expects the process of professionalism to be different in other countries. According to Bleach new knowledge was continually being incorporated into each teacher's existing repertoire. Yet, socially constructed conceptions of professionalism were showcased in government policy documents, guidelines, and regulations of most countries, thus driving a handed down process of professionalism (Colmer, 2017; Hordern, 2014, 2016; Lightfoot & Frost, 2015; Moss, 2014, 2015; Warren, 2014).

Meanwhile, cultural and historical ideals of professionalism were reflected in the work practices of early childhood practitioners, who used an experience based dimension to the work, when expressing views of professional identity (Bleach, 2014; Hordern, 2014, 2016; Taggart, 2016; Warren, 2014). Early childhood teachers emphasized three elements of being professionals in ECCE: dedication, passion, and commitment. Those teachers believed that dedication and commitment to ECCE were the most critical elements shaping professionalism. Additionally, practitioners often stressed that passion

for educating young children was the driving motivation for becoming professionals in ECCE (Bleach, 2014; Harwood & Tukonic, 2016; Monk & Phillipson, 2017; Warren, 2014).

Some researchers claimed that within official material were conversations of professionalism which had the potential to disempower, and were mechanisms for regulation and control (Andrew, 2015; Bloechliger & Bauer, 2016; Tukonic & Harwood, 2015; Mitchell, 2014; Moss, 2014, 2015). Lightfoot and Frost (2015) echoed those claims as ideological, hegemonic processes, which led to the alleged deprofessionalization of teachers, through tight regulations of performance, and thought (Mitchell, 2014; Sims, Forrest, Semann, & Slattery, 2015; Tukonic & Harwood, 2015; Warren, 2014). The authors believed that those dominant government discourses about professionalism were advantageously privileged above other discursive and social forms, and countered factors that shaped EYPs orientation to professionalism (Andrew, 2015; Bleach, 2014; Hordern, 2014, 2016; Mitchell, 2014; Taggart, 2016; Warren, 2014).

Alternative conceptions argued that EYPs did not have to be passive recipients of workforce reforms, but could be active agents shaping reform, (Mitchell, 2014; Sims, Forrest, Semann, & Slattery, 2015; Taggart, 2016; Tukonic & Harwood, 2015; Warren, 2014). Lightfoot and Frost (2015) asserted that standards and regulations were not inhibiting factors, but rather created enabling processes to EYPs, since those possessed a specialized body of knowledge and skills, which contributed to professional identity. The authors drew data from the British arm of a broad European study on professionalism in early childhood, which stated that EYPs working in English settings, could and did

develop professional identity, and engaged in professional practices (Cherryton & Thornton, 2015; Harwood & Tukonic, 2016; Hordern, 2014, 2016; Mitchell, 2014).

According to Colmer (2017), this model of an active professional, linked with more optimistic accounts of how teachers adopted professionalism in the regulated context of schools. This model presented a liberal perspective of professionalism that should be aimed for to enhance successful policy outcomes (Cherryton & Thornton, 2015; Hordern, 2014, 2016; Lightfoot & Frost, 2015). To Colmer this conceptualization of active professionalism in the early years was incomplete, because it was not fully articulated. The researcher reiterated the need to listen to early educators' voices, to fill gaps in theorists' perceptions, a view supported by (Andrew, 2015; Bleach, 2014; Hordern, 2014, 2016; Warren, 2014); and fill the need for further research, in seeking practitioners' views to explore factors that contributed to professional identity (Bleach, 2014; Cansoy & Parlar, 2017; Hordern, 2016; Monk & Phillipson, 2017; Warren, 2014).

Hordern (2014, 2016) conceptualized professionalism in early childhood as underpinned by understanding the importance of professional knowledge and community. Hordern opined that professionalism was shaped by interrelations between utilizing organizations, associations, educational institutions and government (major stakeholders), who had different levels of authority that delineated what professionalism entailed, how individuals entered the profession, and the paths to attainment of desired professional qualifications. The author also reiterated that professionalism was shaped by understanding the knowledge base valued for professional practice. Cansoy and Parlar (2017) advanced the importance of and strong relationship between schools functioning

as professional learning communities and teacher professionalism. The authors cited diverse conceptions and characteristics of professionalism to emphasize the major pillars of teacher professionalism that emerged from the data were: autonomy, collaboration with colleagues, and professional knowledge.

In the absence of this conceptual understanding of professionalism, it was difficult for early childhood practitioners to extend autonomy and creativity; because ECCE was receiving increased attention from policymakers convinced that improving educational outcomes before children started formal schooling had many economic and societal benefits. Such policy driven forces militated against developing a 'groundup' agentic conception (Cherrington & Thornton, 2015; Hordern, 2014, 2016; Tukonic & Harwood, 2015; Warren, 2014) of professionalism amongst ECCE practitioners. According to Hordern (2014, 2016) those forces were insufficient to advance professional knowledge and occupational control.

Contemporary interpretations of teacher professionalism were shifting to include thoughts of teachers being currently confronted by multiple pressures, intensified work demands, and more occupational control (Cherrington & Thornton, 2015; Hordern, 2014, 2016; Lightfoot & Frost, 2015; Skattebol, Adamson, & Woodrow, 2016). In this millennium, different positions about teacher professionalism should be viewed as competing versions, rather than one being fitted into a definition of professionalism (Andrew, 2015; Bloechliger & Bauer, 2016; Creasy, 2015; Tukonic & Harwood, 2015). Bleach (2014) recommended further analysis of discourses of professionalism be reconstructed within professional occupational groups; and stated it was time for a

reconceptualized professionalism in the context of ECCE (Andrew, 2015; Cherrington & Thornton, 2015; Hordern, 2014, 2016; Forrest, Semann, & Slattery, 2014; Lightfoot & Frost, 2015; Taggart, 2016; Warren, 2014).

Other conceptions were: Ethical professionalism, which involved developing strong self identity through possession of the knowledge, skills, and dispositions, vital to confidence and competence in making sound, ethical judgments (Colmer, Waniganayake, & Field 2014; Hordern, 2014, 2016; Monk & Phillipson, 2017; Sims, Forrest, Semann, & Slattery, 2015; Trodd & Dickenson, 2018; Warren, 2014); and engaging in professional dialogue, which held that critical inquiry about teaching practice was an important aspect of professionalism (Andrew, 2015; Bleach, 2014; Colmer, 2017; Colmer, Waniganayake, & Field, 2015; Hordern, 2016; Warren, 2014).

Improving Teacher Quality, the Rationale for Government Mandates

Quality in early childhood care and education is a multi dimensional construct, and an integral concept for ECCE policy, and broader social, economic, and policy issues. It is value laden, and stemmed from local, regional, and national history, cultures, and traditions (Hunkin, 2016, 2018; Jackson, 2015a, 2015b; Sims, Forrest, Semann, & Slattery, 2015). Internationally, ECCE policy rationales articulated, investment for high quality programs and support for young learners (Elwick et al., 2017; Foong, Veloo, Dhamotharan, & Loh, 2018; Jackson, 2015a; Johnson, 2015; Reetu, Renu, & Adarsh, 2017; Sims, Forrest, Semann, & Slattery, 2015; Taggart, 2016).

The most prominent rationale for government mandates and intervention in early childhood is to provide high quality services for children, rather than better working

conditions, although the two are interrelated (Andrew, 2015; Bleach, 2014; Campbell-Barr, 2016; Hui et al., 2017; Hunkin, 2016, 2018;). However, even when similar policy and government tools were used, different theoretical perspectives created early learning culture, and types of reform foci, which were thought to generate contradictory outcomes (Bleach, 2014; Everiss, Hill, & Meade, 2017; Hunkin, 2016, 2018; Reetu, Renu, & Adarsh, 2017).

Government policies reflected limited evidence of practitioners' views on quality in working with children and families, and of contextual factors influencing those views, given that teacher practices are key determinants of quality (Bleach, 2014; Cottle & Alexander, 2014; Bloechliger & Bauer, 2016; Skattebol, Adamson, & Woodrow, 2016). Consequently, more is expected of ECCE practitioners than before. Professionally practitioners performed more complex roles and were subjected to more accountability pressures from external entities (Bleach, 2014; Campbell-Barr & Bogatic, 2017; Harwood & Tukonic, 2016; Johnson, 2015; Taggart, 2016; Urban, 2015; Warren, 2014).

Past and current governments in the United Kingdom had consulted with early years' practitioners, who considered the personal qualities of staff critical to achieving quality service (Everiss, Hill, & Meade, 2017; Hordern, 2014, 2016; Lightfoot & Frost, 2015; Taggart, 2016). Other researchers acknowledged that quality was defined according to measurable, standardized outcomes in the current political climate, but resisted, product based conceptions for process orientated views of quality. However those researchers acknowledged the crucial role of resources, physical space, and funding on those processes (Bloechliger & Bauer, 2016; Everiss, Hill, & Meade, 2017; Lightfoot

& Frost, 2015). Hunkin (2016) found that managers were positively overwhelmed about the developments realized when government funding increased. Those managers reported, improved quality in ECCE services, enhanced professionalism, better response to community needs, reduced burden on local communities, and improved accessibility, participation, and affordability (Everiss, Hill, & Meade, 2017; Hunkin, 2018; Kilderry, 2015). But new, strongly differentiated, funding policy, based on priority groups, incentives, support and rewards, had led to significant cuts. Managers had indicated that further cuts would negatively impact maintenance of prior improvements (Hunkin, 2018; Jackson, 2015b; Kilderry, 2015; Urban, 2015).

Examining early childhood teachers' understanding of quality, illuminated different perspectives about quality (Bleach, 2014; Foong et al., 2018; Hu et al., 2017; Logan, 2017; Monk & Phillipson, 2017; Lightfoot & Frost, 2015); policies and reforms resulted from public concerns about inappropriate and inadequate ECCE programs, tended to imply weak personal qualities in practitioners (Andrew, 2015; Foong et al., 2018; Hunkin, 2018; Millei, Gobby, & Gallagher, 2017; Peterson et al., 2016; Urban, 2015; Warren 2014). The merit of government and national initiatives to address public needs was being debated internationally, because some forms of government action placed government in remote control operating modes, due to reliance on other entities to deliver mandates (Everiss, Hill, & Meade, 2017; Millei, Gobby, & Gallagher, 2017; Reetu, Renu, & Adarsh, 2017; Urban, 2015). An analysis of government mandates in its current form demonstrated lack of the determination and courage needed for a visionary

system of quality assurance (Hunkin, 2016, 2018; Jackson, 2015a; Logan, 2017; Reetu, Renu, & Adarsh, 2017).

Discussions of quality in government mandates pointed to more and improved training, and education of early childhood practitioners, and some studies highlighted a direct association between professional development and quality in ECCE settings (Millei, Gobby, & Gallagher, 2017; Peterson et al., 2016; Sims, Forrest, Semann, & Slatter, 2015; Tanang & Abu, 2014; Warren, 2014). Yet findings suggested that factors establishing quality, the challenge of sustaining quality, how training could be translated into quality practices in settings, and how quality practices could be maintained remained uncertain (Hui et al., 2017; Millei, Gobby, & Gallagher, 2017; Moss, 2015; Reetu, Renu, & Adarsh, 2017). Often, the language of quality used in ECCE regulations undermined rather than supported professional autonomy (Bleach, 2014, 2016; Hordern, 2014, 2016; Hunkin, 2018; Jackson, 2015a, 2015b; Reetu, Renu, & Adarsh, 2017; Urban, 2015; Warren, 2014).

Positive Impacts of Government Mandates

Government mandates, policies, and standards created a professional environment of best practice. Standards were procedures that enabled organizations to create effective systems, policies, and processes; standards also improved operational quality (Creasy, 2015; Kilderry, Nolan, & Scott, 2017; Moore, Almeida, & Barnes, 2018). Official mandates improved operational standards, the qualifications of teachers to comply with contemporary developments, and were key elements of effectiveness in work life (Hui et al., 2017; Reetu, Renu, & Adarsh, 2017; Skattebol, Adamson, & Woodrow, 2016). Those

mandates represented the best and highest standards for teachers (Kilderry, Nolan, & Scott, 2017; Lightfoot & Frost, 2015). Taggart (2016) refuted claims that education reform and new policies deprofessionalized teachers. Taggart stated that those claims ignored the active role teachers had in responding to and reconstructing both policy texts and management practices. Additionally, the author maintained that changed conditions of employment which required formation of new relationships and acquisition of new skills, reprofessionalized teachers (Bloechliger & Bauer, 2016; Kilderry, Nolan, & Scott, 2017; Reetu, Renu, & Adarsh, 2017; Skattebol, Adamson, & Woodrow, 2016).

In some European countries, the professionalism agenda in early childhood was attractive, because it was seen as the key to strengthened labor market position and increased respect for workers (Bolechliker & Bauer, 2016; Hordern, 2014, 2016; Lightfoot & Frost, 2015; Mitchell, 2014; Peeters, Sharmahd, & Budginaite, 2017). The application of top down measures designed to enhance quality were seen as benign, and overwhelmingly positive. Government investment in ECCE in terms of time, policy development, assessment, and regulation, were interpreted as overdue and welcome (Hordern, 2014, 2016; Millei, Gobby, & Gallagher, 2017; Lightfoot & Frost, 2015; Sims, 2014; Taggart, 2016). Some early educators felt that official discourse driving regulatory frameworks did not influence professionalism. Those early educators also thought it was open to interpretation and should not be exaggerated (Sims, 2014; Taggart, 2016).

It was found that professionalism in early childhood was reflective rather than pure reflex, driven by regulating and controlling situations and circumstances. Such professionalism developed agential processes, which served early years' professionals

well (Colmer, 2017; Kilderry, Nolan, & Scott, 2017; Taggart, 2016; Warren, 2014).

Official standards enhanced early childhood teachers' professional credibility (Kilderry, Nolan, & Scott, 2017; Moss, 2015), which enabled those teachers to advocate for greater professional status, better pay, and working conditions (Bleach, 2014; Colmer, 2017; Hui et al., 2017; Taggart, 2016).

The development of a better workforce through government reforms had been generally welcomed. It demonstrated government's commitment to partner with public professionals, to create world class performance (Lightfoot & Frost, 2015). It represented a strengthening of government's approach to facilitating high quality service by maintaining high standards of service, and performance (Andrew, 2015; Bloechliger & Bauer, 2016; Peterson et al., 2016; Skattebol, Adamson, & Woodrow, 2016). It also strengthened user choice and voice, whilst providing opportunities for the best professionals, to manage and operate individual services (Colmer, Waniganayake, & Field, 2015; Kilderry, Nolan, & Scott, 2017). According to Urban (2015) and Warren (2014) standards and requirements helped professional autonomy, by creating a model of technical practice. Therefore, practitioners should not be passive recipients of reform agenda. Practitioners could actively challenge through negotiation, how workers in early childhood were positioned and defined to become autonomous professionals (Bleach, 2014; Colmer, 2017; Kilderry, Nolan, & Scott, 2017; Skattebol, Adamson, & Woodrow, 2016).

External forces do not singlehandedly determine how ECCE professionals made decisions. It was the interaction between those factors and the professional's self

determination, which shaped classroom practice (Bleach, 2014; Colmer, 2017; Hordern, 2014, 2016; Moss, 2015; Wingrave & McMahon, 2016). Early childhood teachers have worked towards changing the image from ‘babysitters’ to professionals who developed curriculum, organized and delivered instruction (Harwood & Tukonic, 2016; Peeters, Sharmahd, & Budginaite, 2017; Wingrave & McMahon, 2016). Those efforts to adopt and excel at professionalism meant that ECCE practitioners were trained to care, nurture, and engage children in physical and cognitive development through management of environments for young children’s systemic education (Nolan & Molla, 2017; Peeters, Sharmahd, & Budginaite, 2017; Sims, 2014).

The implementation of prescriptive curricula may be potentially transformative by enabling and supporting practitioners’ exercise of agency through revisiting its demands and regulatory mechanisms (Bleach, 2014; Brown, Weber, & Yoon, 2016; Nolan & Molla, 2017). Colmer (2017) supports that view by stating that working to implement a mandated curriculum framework can enhance professional identity and professionalism. Additionally, early years’ practitioners were not docile, but active, in attempting to negotiate professionalization of the sector, and responded reflexively to circumstances in pursuit of professional goals (Bleach, 2014; Kilderry, Nolan, & Scott, 2017; Moss, 2015; Nolan & Molla, 2017; Sims, 2014; Warren, 2014).

Negative Impacts of Government Mandates

A historical overview of the politics of teacher professionalism highlighted how the tradition of teacher professionalism as autonomy in curriculum implementation was changed with the introduction of a National Curriculum (Bloechliger & Bauer, 2016;

Brennan, 2011; Costello & Costello, 2016; Perryman, Braun, & Mcguire, 2017; Robson & Fumoto, 2009; Sparapani & Perez, 2015). The professional autonomy of teachers was sacrificed to government's demand for control of curriculum (Bloechliger & Bauer, 2016; Brown, Weber, & Yoon, 2016; Costello & Costello, 2016; Perryman, Braun, & Maguire, 2017; Sachs, 2016; Sparapani & Perez, 2015). Some researchers believed that the technologizing of policy and practice was a means of governing the early childhood workforce, by prescribing norms to which practitioners must conform (Bloechliger & Bauer, 2016; Costello & Costello, 2016; Lightfoot & Frost, 2015; Perryman, Braun, & Maguire, 2017; Sachs, 2016; Taggart, 2016; Warren, 2014). Other researchers also believed that regulatory frameworks led practitioners to conform to dominant constructions of professionalism (Fenech & Lotz, 2016; Holloway & Brass, 2018).

Consequently, the regulatory gaze accompanying those agendas diminished practitioners' empowerment (Brown, Weber, & Yoon, 2016; Hordern, 2014, 2016; Sims, Forrest, Semann, & Slattery, 2015; Urban, 2015; Warren, 2014). Policy requirements resulted in teachers feeling incompetent, the teachers therefore engaged in 'cynical compliance' via adherence to minimum standards. Those mandates had emotional costs for ECCE teachers because it impacted negatively on views of selves (Brown, Weber, & Yoon, 2016, Monk & Phillipson, 2017; Sisson & Iverson, 2014; Perryman, Braun, & Maguire, 2017). Other researchers argued that instead of strengthening the early childhood practitioner's position, the global professionalism agenda led to external control and regulation, which inhibited professional autonomy (Andrew 2015; Bankovic, 2014; Creasy, 2015; Hordern, 2014, 2016; Urban, 2015; Warren, 2014). The 'new

professionalism' espoused in official and regulatory discourses, emphasized public accountability of performance and teachers' responsibility to accept those fast changing conditions (Holloway & Brass, 2018; Sims, Forrest, Monk, & Phillipson, 2017; Semann & Slattery, 2015; Skattebol, Adamson, & Woodrow, 2016; Urban, 2015; Warren, 2014).

The continuous reorganization, restructuring, and rebranding of ECCE services and provisions was confusing, and created tension between policies promoting flexibility and choice, and those that established centrally prescribed targets, implying distrust of ECCE professionals' ability to do the job properly (Andrew, 2015; Brown, Weber, & Yoon, 2016; Holloway & Brass, 2018; Hordern, 2014, 2016; Moss, 2014; Urban, 2014; Warren, 2014). Lack of recognition regarding the complexity of working with young children at both government and societal level had cascading effects on the sector (Andrew, 2015; Bankovic, 2014; Bloechliger & Bauer, 2016; Hordern, 2014, 2016; Sims, 2014). Thus, ECCE is underpinned by unhealthy dissonance, fraught with disappointments and frustrations (Andrew, 2015; Cherrington & Thornton, 2015; Kilderry, 2015; Moore & Clarke, 2016; Wingrave & McMahon, 2016).

Despite many policies aimed at supporting its development, the sector is highly stratified and beset by inequalities (Brown, Weber, & Yoon, 2016; Reetu, Renu, & Adarsh, 2017; Sims, Forrest, Semann, & Slattery, 2015; Warren 2014). Within ECCE, managerial discourse is usually characterized by authority, accountability, and effectiveness, whereas democratic discourse remained peripheral to practice (Holloway & Brass, 2018; Hordern, 2014, 2016; Kilderry, 2015; Wingrave & McMahon, 2016). Conditions of respect, mutuality, and communication, deemed central to nurturing

richness and complexity, were also lacking (Andrew, 2015; Sims, 2014; Sims, Forrest, Semann, & Slattery, 2015; Warren, 2014).

Across the globe, research indicated that the lives of teachers were more stressful, and the balance between personal and work life unacceptable to family and friends (Cumming, 2017; Hordern, 2014, 2016; Warren, 2014). Teachers became disillusioned, frustrated, and found it difficult to locate selves within the new roles demanded, and to accommodate the changes (Holloway & Brass, 2018; Kilderry, 2015; Wingrave & McMahon, 2016). Teachers no longer regarded selves as autonomous and responsible professionals. The introduction of social accountability and consumerism had forced questioning of teacher professionalism, and sense of purpose (Brown, Weber, & Yoon, 2016; Hordern, 2014, 2016; Monk & Phillipson, 2017; Moss, 2014; Warren, 2014). As government mandates continued to create challenging pay and working conditions with young children, the better ECCE practitioners were attracted to formal teaching because it had better career and remuneration prospects (Sims, 2014; Wingrave & McMahon, 2016). Many teachers had left the profession, so as not to experience further alienation in the chosen profession (Cumming, Sumsion, & Wong, 2015; Kilderry, 2015; Mitchell, 2014). Teachers claimed that pressures emanating from centralized reforms, accompanied by excessive bureaucratic procedures, were forcing many to rethink careers (Bloechliger & Bauer, 2016; Kilderry, 2015; Mitchell, 2014).

The language used in government mandates also facilitated the erosion of teacher professionalism (Brown, Weber, & Yoon, 2016; Holloway & Brass, 2018; Warren, 2014). Urban (2015) argued that the presentations of early childhood professionalism in

official policy documents, regulatory frameworks, and curricula, were specific, biased ways of talking about professionalism; that were not necessarily appropriate to early childhood care and education. It was a ‘regime of truths’, an effective way to control and regulate the practices of diverse individuals, through dominant knowledge (Andrew, 2015; Hordern, 2014, 2016; Kilderry, 2015; Sims, Forrest, Semann, & Slattery, 2015; Wingrave & McMahon, 2016).

Discussions about what was meant by and entailed in being an ECCE professional, in terms of expressing expectations of individual practitioners, insufficiently acknowledged systemic inequalities of knowledge producing and processing structures. These served as highly effective regulatory and selfregulating tools (Brown, Weber, & Yoon, 2016; Peeters, Sharmahd, & Budginaite, 2017; Urban, 2015). For practitioners working in settings where effectiveness and desired outcomes were externally, priority decided, it was impossible to make judgments appropriate to the work context (Holloway & Brass, 2018; Hordern, 2014, 2016; Mitchell, 2014; Urban, 2015). Evidence based practice as means of knowledge production to be implemented disqualified practitioners, depriving professional autonomy, and hindering best practice being developed by asking critical questions (Brown, Weber, & Yoon, 2016; Hordern, 2014, 2016; Mitchell, 2014; Urban, 2015; Warren, 2014).

Consequently, a new professionalism, with a common feature focused on practitioner control and pro-activity, was being recommended (Hordern, 2014, 2016; Kilderry, 2015; Lightfoot & Frost, 2015; Mitchell, 2014; Taggart, 2016; Urban, 2015; Warren, 2014). Policy had not always acknowledged the professional knowledge or

status of early years' educators, yet how practitioners' perceived those professional roles, was crucial to professional performance (Andrew, 2015; Brown, Weber, & Yoon, 2016; Warren, 2014; Wingrave & McMahon, 2016). Sims (2014) claimed that reforms resulted in paradoxes about the nature of teaching as a profession, inclusive of how to redefine teacher professionalism more positively, when it was suggested that teachers were being deskilled and the work became more intense (Fenech & Lotz, 2016; Hunkin, 2016; Oberhuemer, 2014, 2018; Mitchell, 2014; Moss, 2015). More tension was created by reforms, which were framed in neoliberal perspectives, but the state and ECCE sector's relationship was contractual in nature (Andrew, 2015; Brown, Weber, & Yoon, 2016; Hunkin, 2016; Lightfoot & Frost, 2015; Sims, 2014; Warren 2014).

Some researchers claimed that as a result of recent market driven education policies, and new management structures aimed at ensuring compliance, teachers were being deprofessionalized (Everiss, Hill, & Meade, 2017; Kilderry, 2015; Mitchell, 2014; Sims, 2014; Warren, 2014). Neoliberal discourses promoted professionalism steeped in masculinist values and cultures. As a highly gendered sector, strongly embedded in the affective realm of caring and nurturance, ECCE became understood as lacking professionalism, because it was deemed hyper feminine (Andrew, 2015; Brown, Weber, & Yoon, 2016; Hunkin, 2016; Wingrave & McMahon, 2016; Urban, 2015). Peeters, Sharmahd, & Budginaite (2017) argued that socially constructed professionalism was grounded in hegemonic normalizations, rising from a specific sociopolitical and economic time, and was disaligned with the caring core of working with young children.

A critical analysis of policy revealed that policymakers invested heavily in creating normalizing constructions of the early childhood professional. Therefore, policy discourse denied space for alternative, internal constructions of professionalism to flourish (Andrew, 2015; Fenech & Lotz, 2016; Hordern, 2014, 2016; Kilderry, 2015; Mitchell, 2014; Urban 2015). Brown, Weber, and Yoon (2016) argued for capturing and promoting aspects of a ground up professionalism inclusive of a pedagogical approach which recognized work with children, parents and caregivers; the requirements of an ethic of care; and the importance of reflexivity for professional practice. It was felt that this would help ECCE practitioners resist policies that limited professionalism to the technician approach seen in policy documents (Andrew, 2015; Bleach, 2014; Johnson, 2015; Peeters, Sharmahd, & Budginaite, 2017; Sims, Forrest, Semann, & Slattery, 2015).

Alternative Conceptions of Professionalism in Early Childhood

In efforts to improve services for young children, governments pursued forms of universal progress, which demanded and determined who performed those services. Efforts to illustrate how early educators were composed revealed identity fragility, which was shaped by and subjected to powerful forces like current reforms (Creasy, 2015; Hordern, 2014, 2016; Lightfoot & Frost, 2015; Mitchell, 2014; Osgood, 2016; Peeters, Sharmahd, & Budginaite, 2017). Those efforts had inadvertently illuminated how current conceptions of class differences and gendered experiences of professionalism, stipulated the meaning of being, which highlighted other possibilities (Andrew, 2015; Bloechliger & Bauer, 2016; Monk & Phillipson, 2017; Sims & Pedey, 2015). To achieve pride in the

work people required synergy between external forces and internal mechanisms, including emotional wellbeing and satisfaction (Harwood & Tukonic, 2016; Hordern, 2014, 2016; Warren, 2014).

Although external policies and reform mandates contributed toward a skilled workforce, pride did not come from being more skilled, but from an attained sense of agency (Creasy, 2015; Lewis & West, 2017; Hordern, 2014, 2016; Warren, 2014). How agency was exercised, was embedded in regulatory practices in which agency was scripted and practiced. Government scripts and ‘regimes of truth’ coerced subjects into particular ways of being and eroded ECCE practitioners’ agency (Hordern, 2014, 2016; Moss, 2015; Murphy, 2015; Osgood, 2016; Urban 2015; Warren, 2014). These researchers offered alternative conceptions of professionalism in early childhood; based upon the complex, multifaceted roles of practitioners therein, and resisted simple quantification of prescribed, discrete lists of daily duties. Such a conception would enable better policy mandated foci, and positive social views and values (Campbell-Barr, Georgeson, & Varga, 2015; Einarsdottir et al., 2014; Fenech & Lotz, 2016; Sims & Pedey, 2015; Van Laere & Vanderbroeck, 2016).

Existing discussions on professionalism in ECCE tended to express expectations about practitioners, rather than expressing professional reality (Andrew, 2015; Hordern, 2014, 2016; Osgood, 2016; Skattebol, Adamson, & Woodrow, 2016; Taggart, 2016). By reflecting on the discursive landscape in which ECCE practitioners were located, and considering autobiographical subjectivities, one could dismantle and reconceptualize professionalism (Andrew, 2015; Hordern, 2014, 2016; Lewis & West, 2017; Moss, 2014,

2015; Osgood, 2016). Rationalism, accountability, and other traits encompassed within government discourses of professionalism were absent from practitioners' selfdefinitions (Andrew, 2015; Hordern, 2014, 2016; Moss, 2014, 2015; Skattebol, Adamson, & Woodrow, 2016). Professional ways of being, evolved from active engagement and negotiation with discourses by which individuals were shaped and positioned. This counter-discourse prioritized an ethic of care and the affective domain, in a version of professionalism form within (Albin-Clark, et al. 2018; Van Laere & Vandebroeck, 2016; Luff & Kanyal, 2015; Taggart, 2016).

Democratic professionalism is an alternative discourse, emphasizing collaboration and alliance building between teachers and other educational stakeholders, aimed at altering traditional power relations (Clausen, 2015; Einarsdottir et al. 2014; Lewis & West, 2017; Sims & Pedey, 2015). Van Laere and Vanderbroeck (2016) argued that early childhood teachers' views contributed to an authentic perspective that enabled reconceptualization of professionalism, to reflect the reality of early childhood teachers' experiences (Albin-Clark, et al. 2018; Cekaite & Bergnehr, 2018; Einarsdottir et al., 2014 Van Laere & Vanderbroeck, 2016).

Osgood (2016) found that through emotional labor and selfmanagement opportunities, which accounted for effects of professional practices on others, a new discourse could be promoted which challenged the limited version of neoliberal government discourse. Participants afforded high importance to acting in nonjudgmental and socially just ways; working collegially; and being reflexive and selfcritical (Brown, Weber, & Yoon, 2016; Hordern, 2014, 2016; Taggart, 2016; Warren, 2014). The authors

argued that government and policymakers should move beyond promulgation of hegemonic discourses (Henderson, 2014; Osgood, 2016; Sisson & Iverson, 2014; Urban 2015), and instead, allow early years' workers to reconceptualize professional identities for themselves (Andrew, 2015; Ang, 2014; Campbell-Barr, 2014; Henderson, 2014; Warren, 2014).

Professional dialogue enhanced and fostered professionalism, because those individuals contended that together with having clear external standards framing practice, professionals conversed about the different ways to perform the job. This implied that early educators' teaching practices were guided by application of subjective values and beliefs (Albin-Clark et al., 2018; Einarsdottir et al., 2014; Hordern, 2014, 2016; Taggart, 2016). Professionalism, then, is an ongoing process – an act of becoming. Early educators learn from professional experiences, professional development, dialogue with colleagues, and engagement in theoretical ideas which help articulate ethical caring relationships with children (Albin-Clark et al., 2018; Andrew, 2015; Cekaite & Bergbeher, 2018; Sims, Forrest, Semann, & Slattery, 2015; Tanang & Abu, 2014; Urban, 2015). Professionalism from within is shaped by life history and gendered, raced, and classed subjectivities. It demonstrated adherence to collective, democratic practices that promoted interdependence, collaboration, and an ethic of care, through carefully executed emotional labor (Hordern, 2014, 2016; Luff & Kanyal, 2015; Osgood, 2016; Taggart, 2016; Van Laere & Vandebroek, 2016; Warren, 2014).

Emotional labor is conceptualized as a counter narrative in local sites, as resistance to unprecedented policy reforms, that posed serious threats to the authenticity

and effectiveness of professionalism from within (Einarsdottri et al., 2014; Cottle & Alexander, 2014; Cumming, 2015; Hedlin, Aberg, & Johansson, 2018; Van Laere & Vanderbroeck, 2016; Warren, 2014). The emotional labor involved in working with children placed tremendous burdens on practitioners and could deplete the psychic reserves of those invested in construction of a caring self (Hedlin, Aberg, & Johansson, 2018; Hordern, 2016; Luff & Kanyal, 2015; Taggart, 2016; Warren, 2014). An alternative paradigm of a relational, systemic professionalism, which embraced openness and uncertainty, and encouraged joint construction of professional knowledge and practice, is therefore required (Albin-Clark et al. 2018; Ang, 2014; Cekaite & Bergnehr, 2018; Cumming, Sumsion, & Wong, 2015; Luff & Kanyal, 2015; Sims & Pedey, 2015; Tanang & Abu, 2014).

Importance of a Code of Ethics

Together with increased accountability, government mandates also called for greater professionalism. In government mandates, professionalism referred to and included possessing a core body of knowledge, skills, and dispositions that defined and guided practice in that field. Adherence to standards of behavior regarded as desirable by members, and those dependent upon its services. Processes through which members were held accountable for the professional judgments made, and voluntary commitment by members to advance what is right and good, through community interaction (Fenech & Lotz, 2016; Solvason, 2017; Taggart, 2016; Warren, 2014). Those tenets outlined ideals and principles of a code of ethics and were the pillars of the NAEYC's Code of Ethics,

(2005) which guided what early childhood practitioners did, and how the job should be performed. Trinidad and Tobago like many developing countries adopted NAEYC's code of ethics, as a framework underpinning official documents and discourses, national services, programs, and curricula. NAEYC's code of ethics provided a guide for determining, how early childhood practitioners were viewed, valued, judged, and what is expected.

According to Einarsdottir et al. (2014), early childhood practitioners framed professional ethics, through a justice oriented approach, and a relational ethic of care. The complex diversity inherent in ECCE practice required a new ethical professionalism, which merged specialist knowledge with sound judgment, and thoughtful action (Cumming, 2015; Johnson, 2015; Warren, 2014). Since justice and care orientations were underpinned by relationships crucial to ethical professionalism (Einarsdottir et al., 2014; Fenech & Lotz, 2016; Johnson, 2015; Warren, 2014), early childhood practitioners applied both approaches, in treating with dilemmas in practice (Henderson, 2014; Hordern, 2014, 2016; Moss, 2015; Robson & Martin, 2019; Taggart, 2016). Working with young children, like other caring professions, has a moral component. Therefore, together with skills and competence, caring should be central to professionalism. An ethic of care was essential to working with young children (Cekaite & Bergnehr, 2018; Luff & Kanyal, 2015; Taggart, 2016; Van Laere & Vanderbroeck, 2016; Warren, 2014).

Some practitioners based professionalism on a political ethic of care, which challenged other concepts of care, and positioned it at the core of social thinking, together with love, passion, and hope (Luff & Kanyal, 2015; Skattebollo, Adamson, & Woodrow,

2016; Van Laere & Vanderbroeck, 2016). Early childhood practitioners referred to a code of ethics, as benchmarks for behavior, and to reflect ideals of moral practice in daily work (Robson & Martin, 2019; Solvason, 2017; Taggart, 2016). For those reasons, a recognized code of ethics should underpin the debate, discourses, policies, and regulations driving professionalism in early childhood (Fenech & Lotz, 2016; Robson & Martin, 2019; Solvason, 2017; Taggart, 2016).

Being ethical meant observing stated principles, and justifying actions through those principles. These approaches grounded teacher assessment to standardize value judgments of performance (Fenech & Lotz, 2016). Given that care and a social justice orientation were vital to professional teaching codes and traditions, it was significant that terms like care, caring, or an ethic of care, were absent from most policy documents (Skattebol, Adamson, & Woodrow, 2016; Taggart, 2016; Warren 2014). This was a striking omission, as qualities like passion, care, and love were characteristics of excellent teachers (Hordern, 2014, 2016; Sims & Pedey, 2015; Taggart, 2016; Warren, 2014). This created a paradox for early childhood practitioners. However, heart, soul, and passion were essential to working with young children (Albin et al., 2018; Cekaite & Bergnehr, 2018; Hordern, 2014, 2016; Luff & Kanyal, 2015; Warren, 2014), but these qualities restricted early childhood practitioners being considered professional; although it did not undermine the professional status of those teaching middle childhood and upwards, nursing, social work, or theological ministry (Hordern, 2014, 2016; Taggart, 2016; Warren, 2014).

Practitioners' Responses to Government Mandates

Most of the literature reviewed above spoke of early childhood practitioners' responses to government mandates for increased professionalism. This section briefly summarized those studies: Robson and Martin (2019) reported that some professional practices imposed by policy and deemed acceptable by individual teachers remained unchallenged and unchanged. However, aspects of policy seen as obstructive were resisted by subtle forms of ceaseless struggle. Ethical dilemmas arose from implementation of national policy. These were unresolved or routine like because the policies pervaded practice. National policies illuminated ways early educators may utilize theory and work experience to navigate ethical dilemmas. Holloway and Brass (2018) conducted a comparative study to examine the reconstruction of ECCE teachers as subject through one decade of neoliberal standards and accountability reforms that enacted changes education across the United States of America. The researchers juxtaposed two successive standards and accountability movements: the NCLB (2001), and Race to the Top (RTTT). Those standards and reforms showed a paradigmatic change in views of teachers' professional knowledge and subjectivity. Early childhood teachers positioned NCLB's selfdisciplinary mechanisms as external intrusions on professional autonomy, professionalism and practice'; the teachers positioned RTTT's accountability mechanisms as the modes of self awareness and appreciation of core values and quality. A collapse between teachers – the governed, and the government – accountability mechanisms; and the three dominant views of teachers – marketized,

managed and performative was illuminated. A call for further research into that collapse and its implications for US education was made.

Moore, Almeida, and Barnes (2018) questioned the process of Education for Sustainability (EfS) policy implementation, specifically highlighting the difficulties of interpreting and translating policies into practice in local educational settings in Australia. The findings illustrate that those policies were dominated by infrastructural rather than educational benefits that minimized policy objectives. The authors advocated for a systems thinking approach to policy implementation and proposed ramifications to facilitate more effective integration of EfS into curriculum.

Hunkin (2018) investigated the impact of the National Quality Framework in Australia which elevated early childhood policy into the broader economic reform agenda. Hunkin found that the government's discourse of quality in ECEC policy was used to realign quality ECEC outcomes with educative outcomes to selectively grow and govern workers within the sector through performance related standards and incentives. But the complex and subjective nature of quality makes for difficult sectoral execution, given Australia's market model of provision. According to Foong, Veloo, Dhamotharan, and Loh (2018) international research has shown that qualified early educators in the workforce are vital to providing quality ECCE programs and for improved professionalism. Yet, in Malaysia the majority of ECCE teachers in the private sector are young, underqualified, inexperienced, and underpaid. Given the Malaysian government's goal to raise the minimum qualification of all preschool teachers; it is urgent that teachers

in the private sector upgrade knowledge and skills, to enhance professionalism so that quality early education can be provided to children attending private sector programs.

Hedlin, Aberg, and Johansson (2018) interviewed 30 preschool teachers to understand perceptions of adequate touching in the climate of policy that ignores the relation core of ECEC work. Historically, care has been viewed as opposite to paid, employment, education and professionalism. Findings showed that while preschool teachers thought touching appropriate in ECEC, the teachers differentiated between too much and too little care; advocating for professional balance for touching in ECEC that meets children's developmental needs and ethical, professional practice. Cekaite and Bergnehr (2018) posited that relational care, interpersonal intimacy and emotional attunement are crucial to children's holistic development and wellbeing. Using video footage of ECEC classrooms, the study found that educators' affectionate-comforting touch was used for emotion regulation as compassionate response to children's distress. Affectionate-controlling touch was used to mildly control children's conduct and participation in activities, or to mitigate educators' verbal disciplining. The study demonstrated the emotional complexity of ECEC social practices and supports holistic policies advocating for embodied relational care to be integrated in ECEC; contrary to ideas that link professionalism to emotional distance and lack of physical contact.

The above findings were supported by Albin-Clark, Shirley, Webster, and Woolhouse (2018) who posited the dyadic teacher-child relationship as paramount in children's learning experiences and early educators' professionalism. Interpretation of four early educators' life history narratives through a developmental systems lens

provided insights into how those educators' understood personal and professional relationships with children and professionalism. Implications for initial teacher education and professional development were outlined. Trodd and Dickenson (2018) review practitioners' views, in personal reflections and focus groups. The authors found that development of practitioners' professional identities and as professional learners emerged when professionals collaborated, shared the learning, reflected on practice, and sought to implement change in the settings. In this global climate of ongoing change and uncertainty in ECEC policy and practice, professional collaboration and learning can position ECEC practitioners as reflective, confident members of the professional workforce.

Reetu, Renu, and Adarsh (2017) described policy initiative for quality reform in India's ECCE sector, in keeping with global trends to provide quality early education. Those reforms took the form of constitution amendments, acts, developed quality standards and a curriculum framework. The authors found that the government had compromised quality standards for ECCE that led to expected and unexpected issues and challenges. In some areas, progress towards quality was seen while other areas showed low achievement in quality reforms. Thus, India missed its goal to ensure quality in ECCE. More research into India's ECCE sector is needed. Campbell-Barr (2017) reported that the early childhood workforce was central to quality in ECEC, but that government discussions of quality were dominated by the level and duration of teacher training. Campbell-Barr reviewed literature that highlighted quality that extended beyond the structural including early childhood practitioners' knowledge not acquired from

qualification or training; but rather less tangible, innate attitudes which guided working with children. The author looked at the attitude practitioners bring to ECEC and advocated for illuminating practitioners' tacit attitudinal knowledge for guiding quality in ECEC.

According to Logan (2017) in ECEC policy, the importance of quality is an undeniable concept. However, investigating the history of ECEC policy, Logan discovered tensions between quality that endure and other ways were forgotten. The author found that at the community, market and investment levels quality was viewed differently revealing tension between dominant discourse which identified times when policy forgot the importance of sites for policy learning. This uncovered complex explanations of quality in ECEC policy. Elwick et al. (2017) critiqued policy discourse around the pursuit of quality in early year education. In England, policy problematizes use of the term quality and attempts to standardize its meaning. This illuminated the disconnect that exists between policy and actual ECCE practice. Through discourse analysis of government documents and interviews with early educators, issues that resonate and can inform debate about the meaning of quality emerged. It became apparent there was considerable disquiet among early educators regarding the current qualifications and training landscape; particularly in terms of what many viewed as ideologically driven policymaking, not informed by dialogue with workers in the sector.

Millei and Gallagher (2017) reported that ECEC in Australia still struggled with achieving universal access and producing detailed, consistent data to ground national evidence base. Government mandated provisional numbers were the key to finalizing

processes through which preschools strategized, modelled and calculated numbers to inform and form policy. Through one director's notes, the authors explored the complex tangle of those processes and found that professionals were placed in ambivalent positions, ethical dilemmas emerged, practical and material consequences arose, and political avenues for formalizing those processes, all of which have implications for professionalism in ECEC.

Millei, Gobby, and Gallagher (2017) deepened investigations into the continued process to make universal access a reality in New South Wales, by focusing on the multi-layered agentile relationship between many stakeholders. One foci were on government's and policy makers' actions to created funding models as a vehicle for change through the school's participation in policy making and doing. Millei, Gobby, and Gallagher argued that government's actions were political manoeuvring in which responsibility for policy making was relegated to early childhood stakeholders. This manoeuvring silenced and further fragmented the ECEC sector, but also created spaces to continue the struggle for recognition through the accountability measures government introduced. In this case, policy had both positive and negative impacts on professionalism.

Perryman, Ball, Braun, and Maguire (2017) explored policy translation as occurring daily in schools, in terms of relationships and practices that enable policy to become practice, perception and self-crafting of teachers. The researchers found that teachers made themselves subjects of policy, and argued that the translation process, its practices and techniques are forms of ethics that made a new, grounded version of professionalism. This points to the positive impacts of policy in that teachers improve

themselves, becoming 'good teachers' through ownership of policy. Teachers become reflective, ethical subjects responsible for the performance of students and the school, subtly persuaded by government, dominated yet free.

Lewis and West (2017) reported that ECEE in England is highly marketised and since the change in government, stronger austerity agenda have led to changes in policy goals in terms of availability, affordability and quality. These policy changes have lowered professionalism in ECEC, due to increased child to teacher ratios, decreased funding and provisions that in turn led to increased stress for practitioners and higher rates of burnout. Everiss, Hill, and Meade (2017) investigated the impact of changing state priorities on ECCE policies in New Zealand and found that market-driven policy underpinned the Ministry of Education's 'hands-off' approach to the supply and management of ECCE services. The government focused on enrolment targets at the expense of quality initiatives, especially those relating to teacher training and qualification. Those changes had the negative impact of lowered professionalism in the sector, largely because of the increasing numbers of untrained persons in the workforce.

Campbell-Barr and Bogatic (2017) examined recent global interest in the function of ECEC that led to increasing scrutiny of those services for evidence demonstrating effective practice. However, what effective practice means and from whose perspective fueled research with diverse starting points and agendas. The researchers viewed the growing global interest in ECEC as being increasingly guided by narrow perspectives of the sector as a social investment strategy giving children foundations for life-long learning in the global knowledge economy. Campbell-Barr and Bogatic found negative impacts

that lowered professionalism in the sector due to global discourses constraining practitioners; generating contrasting feelings between welcomed interventions and compromised pedagogical ideas; increased expectations of practitioners; instrumentalizing childhood and children; and creating confusion regarding the social welfare function of ECEC. Some positive impacts were also observed by way of opening avenues to convince government to invest in ECEC and to question the increasing expectations. The paradox between meeting global ECEC quality standards and finding culturally relevant solutions to local problems was identified.

Monk and Phillipson (2017) examined how Asian early childhood educators viewed themselves in terms of professionalism. Findings revealed that educators' perceived professionalism and professionalization as related to work and life, cultural understandings and relationships, and how the educators were viewed by others in the context of the status of early childhood education. Monk and Phillipson noted diverse definitions of professionalism. The boundaries of these dimensions have blurred illuminating concerns about personal well-being, brought on by increasing workload, fast changing policies and technological advancement. Early childhood educators struggled to attain balance between personal capacity, and societal and institutional expectations driven by educational reforms. Solvason (2017) explored the importance of ethics in early childhood research and professionalism. Solvason argued that the absence of the words ethics and professionalism from government policy in the United Kingdom was no indication of their value in early childhood. The researcher also sought to prove a causal

link between ethical approaches and quality practice that she viewed as the foundations of professionalism.

Colmer (2017) explored the contribution of collaborative professional learning to the growth of leadership, professional identity and professionalism in Australia's early childhood sector. Colmer argued that implementing a mandated curriculum framework enhanced practitioners' professional identity and professionalism. Colmer looked at leadership practice during professional development and implementation exercises; the data suggested that collaborative professional dialogue enabled the development of professional identity that contributed to practitioners' sense of agency and professionalism. Cansoy and Parlar (2017) examined the relationship between schools being professional learning communities and teacher professionalism in Turkey. The authors found that through professional collaboration, sharing and discussion of instructional strategies, team teaching and reflection, teachers' work performance improved. The data showed three major indicators of teacher professionalism to be autonomy, collective learning and application.

Van Laere and Vanderbroeck (2016) examined early childhood teachers' views on 'educare' via video focus groups. It was found that the hierarchy between education and care led to some preschool teachers developing a technical, distant conception of professionalism in ECEC. The literature revealed that the distant, technical concept of professionalism was severely criticized because of its potential to exclude children not socialized to this narrow view of education and the dearth of democratically debated meanings of early childhood education. The researchers posited the ECEC needs a more

normative professionalism in which emotions and value-bound aspects of professional actions are central. The importance of an ethics of care in ECEC professionalism is based on education. Care in education is deeply experiential, ethical, philosophical and political; and breaking down the materialism discourse may increase significantly.

Watson and Michael (2016) examined education policy and constructions of teacher professionalism and the process of translation by which policy is enacted at local level. Using the social logic lens that describe the rules governing practices in a social domain, and the political logic that facilitates review of how practices are contested and changes over time; the researchers found in Scotland the discursive context for teacher professional development was shifting from continuing professional development to professional learning. Thus, the language and material enactment of policy as translations resulted in practices emerging and unfolding in unpredictable ways with implications for teacher professionalism.

Sachs (2016) investigated different factors shaping teachers' professional practice and identity, a 10-year old call to action to mobilize teachers and reflected on how far the ECEC profession progressed in response to the call to action. Sachs identified some factors influencing and shaping the teaching profession as changing policy and expectations, working conditions and continuing professional development. Sachs argued that different times need different responses and that current thinking and debates about teacher professionalism circulate around professional learning. The author advocated for systems, schools and teachers to validate their practices through research that would in turn enhance and showcase their professionalism. Moore and Clarke (2016) conducted a

critical exploration of teacher's attachment to ideas of professionalism, which enable a process of teachers being obliged to implement centralized and local education policies they do not believe in but are forced to enact. The researchers argue that professionalism involves interwoven past occupational and present organizational discourses and that the past facilitate implementation of the present. Using notions of 'cruel optimism' illuminated teachers' attachment to professionalism helped to undermine the values they believe professionalism embodied.

Peterson et al. (2016) investigated the ratings of four countries regarding the professionalism of preschool teachers within a cross-cultural context. Those countries offer a holistic, child-centred, democratic and value-based approach to ECEC. The researchers described professionalism by seven processes: interaction, family involvement, planned education and evaluation of children's development, teaching strategies, support for professional development, creating a growth environment and development of values. Findings showed variance in some dimension across countries resulting in variance in ratings of professionalism. However, within countries those dimensions received higher ratings due to cultural and contextual subjectivities.

Cumming (2016) reported that across the globe, teachers' lives were more stressful, and the balance between their personal and work lives unacceptable to family and close friends. Cumming reported tangential attention to emotional impacts as well as policy and regulatory impacts on early childhood educators. Those teachers claimed that pressure emanated from centralized reforms accompanied by bureaucratic procedures. In some countries, teachers' workload became excessive because government reforms

aimed to reduce central control gave more freedom and responsibility for implementing reforms to schools. Hordern (2016) advocated for early childhood professionalism based upon professional community and professional knowledge, shaped by relations between the social and epistemic with relevant professional knowledge given priority according to the involvement of different organisations, institutions and public entities. The author argued that processes that recognize the validity of core bodies of knowledge for practice are required to advance early childhood professionalism. This requires sociality derived from disciplinary communities adopted by professionalized occupations. However, in England, the development of professional communities that could advance professionalism in ECEC is challenged by the fragmented nature of the workforce, organizational diversity and role of the government.

Harwood and Tukonic (2016) explored the self-constructed perceptions of early educators' professionalism in Canada. Findings showed that all participants held strong self-perceptions of professionalism regardless of their level of education. Participants reported: high levels of job satisfaction, competence, recognition as a professional from others, and self-recognition as a professional. Harwood and Tukonic's notions of professionalism focuses on individual qualities considered professional. However, no mention was made of criticality, authority or the historical, gendered, cultural, racial and social practices of early childhood education. Those constructs present in policy give rise to tensions between participants and official expectations and practices.

Costello and Costello (2016) reported on an investigation into implementation of standardized instructional and assessment materials, and the emphasis on consistent

program use, reporting and evaluation in ECEC. Issues of professionalism particularly its relationship with prescribed curriculum, emotional impact and teacher resistance were explored. The researchers found both negative and positive impacts in that professionalism was challenged when teachers adhered with fidelity to program processes. However, fidelity to the program's purpose could allow for teacher decision-making and autonomy within the program or practice context. This could auger well for teacher professionalism in ECCE. Brown, Weber, and Yoon (2016) documented the pedagogical and practical struggles of early educators who questioned the norms and practices of high-stakes neo-liberal early childhood system. Although offered alternative conceptions of teaching through professional development, the early educators did not feel empowered enough to enact individual or collective conceptions of curriculum change in the high-stakes teaching contexts. The early educators were overrun by state's demands for all children to attain specific test scores at particular points. This impediment to change highlights the effectiveness of the power that exists within neo-liberal reform.

Bloechliger and Bauer (2016) advanced knowledge about job demands and resources among teachers in early care and education. Teachers reported low job control, although job control was identified as a predictor of workers' well-being especially for early care and education staff. Personal characteristics were less important for educators' work experience. Whether structural or personal, these variables are expressions of professionalism. Schreyer and Krause (2016) and Viernickel et al. (2014) pointed to the benefits of favorable employment conditions for work-related attitudes, health and

behavior of educators that promote professionalism and facilitate daily work with children. These researchers concluded that government agencies and policy-makers should continuously assess and improve working conditions, offer professional development, support and pedagogical dialogue about issues in daily work. Enforcing low child-to-teacher ratios in daily practice should be a priority. Other measures like employing more qualified staff as floaters to allow more planning and preparation time and lift the burden of continuous interaction with children; and improving structural features in ECEC centers can help achieve the goal of a stable, skilled and experienced workforce and high professionalism.

According to Fenech and Lotz (2016) the dominant construction of teacher professionalism in early childhood education as regulated technical practice diminishes early educators' undertaking advocacy at the systems level. Fenech and Lotz proposed a grounded construction of professionalism that provides space for professional practice to move beyond the classroom and into the political sphere. Early educators who undertake systems advocacy in their professional practice demonstrate that such work leads ethical considerations outside of rules expressed in ethical codes. It is driven by moral purpose and social justice for young children, families, colleagues and employers. Potentially, early educators can move beyond dominant constructions of teacher professionalism that place systems advocacy as antithetical to daily practice; by utilizing internationalized ethical values and frameworks to motivate and guide the work.

According to Tennhoff, Nentwich, and Vogt (2015) men in early childhood are subject to different discourse and mistrust while others view men's position of otherness

in the field as new and potentially innovative. Through interviews with male early educators in Switzerland, it was found that the link between femininity and ECE affects men's position in paradoxical ways. Some argue that a gender-specific interpretation of professionalism restricts men's entry in ECE. However, data analysis showed how men in ECE engage these discourses can serve to stabilize their position therein. As discourses construct men as wanted, their presence becomes legitimate. By pointing to the masculine pedagogical style, avant-garde status or agency and assessing the job as very demanding, men are able to construct and take up positions that resolve the conflict between gender identity and the female connotation of the job. Additionally, the minority status of men in ECE could be reframed and masculinity would become a resource. It is important to consider that the connection between masculinity and professionalism is inherent in wider understanding of professionalism as being male. Such a view is disaligned to the ECCE sector.

Sparapani and Perez (2015) focused on standardized curriculum, how it affects the teachers who enact it and the students who experience the curriculum; to understand the relationship, between standardized curriculum and teachers' work and professionalism. Globally, governments have becoming increasingly involved in crafting policies that regulate curriculum, resulting in educational systems designing standardized curriculum. The assumption that standardized curriculum will meet the needs of each student is grossly misplaced and exerts pressure on teachers, prohibiting the use of teachers' individual judgement to enact curriculum to meet the needs of each student. Many school leaders do not allow teachers flexibility in curriculum implementation and

view it as non-adherence to the standardized curriculum. In those settings, three core aspect of professionalism – autonomy, flexibility, and using sound judgement are eroded by expectations of curriculum implementation.

Sims and Pedey (2015) posited that calls by western nations to professionalize the early childhood education and care sector were advocated in order to align status, pay and work conditions in early childhood to the primary and secondary sectors. Sims and Pedey explored the case in Bhutan hoping to offer different ways of conceptualizing the route to professionalization of that sector. Sims and Pedey found that risks to the pursuit of professionalism surfaced when adhering to education policies, particularly policies that reifies teaching and learning, and problematises relationship and caring work. Those education policies were based on the assumption that early childhood might be recognized as a profession if it took on the characteristics of education. According to Murphy (2015), investment in early years' service in Ireland is low and focused on expanding access. However, expanding service without paying equal attention to quality will not yield the desired benefits. Since the workforce is at a low level of professional development and qualification, it is impractical to expect staff to fully engage quality initiative without consistent support. Improved working conditions, salaries and career prospects in ECCE are needed to attract and retain qualified persons who would implement quality reforms and drive professionalism in the sector. Therefore, increased state investment in ECCE is required.

Luff and Kanyal (2015) explored the work of early years' practitioners in England and found three dimensions of maternal thinking – preservation of the child, fostering the

growth of the child, and social acceptance of the child enshrined within. Luff and Kanyal argue that ethics of care are crucial to early childhood pedagogy and is driven by engagement of student teachers during training. The aim was to include an ethic of care as a holistic guiding morality and professionalism in early years' settings. The researchers' aspirations for ECE informed and inspired by maternal thinking and an ethic of care, goes deeper than simply maintaining caring relationships in ECE settings and immediate communities, to the creation of a more peaceful, equitable and sustainable world.

Cumming, Sumsion, and Wong (2015) evaluated efforts to address early childhood workforce challenges in the Australian context where extensive early childhood reforms are underway. Cumming, Sumsion, and Wong found that policy emphasis on credentialing and qualifications conflates professionalization with professionalism, thus shaping conceptions of professionalism in limited ways. This is problematic because the literature has noted the many complex ways professionalism is infused in early educators' practice. The researchers concluded by arguing for greater attention to early educators' daily practices and the forces shaping these milieu, which may offer new avenues for supporting workforce sustainability.

Cumming (2015) used concepts of macro and micro-politics to illuminate some complex exchanges between early educators and the work environment, and the impact on professionalism. Cumming found both constraining and enabling effects in those exchanges. There is a need to foster flexible conditions in work environments that facilitate educators' practice and capacity to shape productive ways of being. Such open spaces enhance and support educators' resilience and capacity for facilitating change, and

improves their professionalism. However, sustained government attention and action by way of remuneration, conditions commensurate with skills, knowledge and values are needed to sustain educators' capacity to remain in the sector. Johnson (2015) examined concepts of professionalism in discursive discourses about teacher quality. The researcher found that in some context, professionalism was used as a euphemism for quality and reform. Johnson drew on research findings about teachers' understanding of the diverse ways the term professionalism was used in discussions of teacher quality, and highlighted three key assumptions that appear to underpin contemporary professionalism discourses. The findings suggested that the reinification of professionalism may have had a number of regrettable consequences for teachers and challenged the apparent lack of evidence that links professionalism, however it may be defined, with quality educational outcomes. Johnson argued that the emergence of professionalism as a signifier of quality, has served to obscure and confuse many other important issues concerning the quality of teaching.

Campbell-Barr, Georgeson, and Varga (2015) explored how considerations of the cultural and training contexts of countries can explain differences identified in policy, history and language, and the extent to which this impact professionalism in ECE. The authors cite Egan (2009) view of training in developing professional early educators and the need for wide ranging experiences so students can consider different forms of knowledge – theoretical and attitudinal - that inform professionalism. While cultural context shaped students' experiences, it raised questions regarding the provision of spaces for students to reflect on professionalism. The researchers intimated that reflection was

part of ECE discourse. It focused on the relational aspects of understanding practice constructed through discussion and observation of others practice. Reflection was seen as a way to make sense of practice and to move towards professionalism.

Brown, Lan, and Jeong (2015) investigated policymakers' promotion of access to ECE programs to improve children's readiness and how teachers responded to those policies. Brown, Lan, and Jeong found that the policies were based upon neoliberal conceptions of governance that viewed policy solutions through economic rather than democratic terms. This shift in conception affected teachers of young children in multiple ways. While teachers mimicked policymakers' neoliberal reforms, its subtlety was overtaking attempts at resistance. The findings illuminated challenges faced as reforms continued to change the purpose and direction of early childhood, and professionalism within the sector. Clausen (2015) explored how the limitations of a schoolification discourse dominant in England and Denmark, potentially displaces children, their teachers and parents as democratic stakeholders. Clausen invited the global early years' community to find ways of developing resistance to the pressures of the neoliberal accountability culture and external governance. The author cited Taguehi (2010) who posited the more that was known about young children's learning and meaning-making, the more people shaped policy around narrow, controlling, complexity-reducing curricula and teaching strategies. This neoliberal discourse silences professional voices, hinders local democracy and teacher professionalism.

Ang (2014) argued for the importance of recognizing the diverse contexts in which children learn that sometimes are at odds with government prescribed curriculum

and policies. Tensions exist about the role of early education and what it entails – a nexus for enriching children’s learning experiences and lives or preparation for schooling. The author called for a rethinking of the role of early childhood education and proposed new considerations for early years’ practice. First, a more holistic approach to assessment and curriculum and deeper focus on the affective domain of learning. And second, to consider resistive steps early years’ professionals may take in reclaiming autonomy and tacit knowledge and understanding that informs practice and professionalism. Bankovic (2014) explored early childhood professionalism in the context of the Republic of Serbia connecting to international debates; through the use of official documents and scholarly literature. The researcher found that professionalism in Serbia was a multilevel phenomenon based on the policy context of teachers’ daily work. This supported the argument that professionalism is not an individual, but systemic phenomenon resulting from interaction and collaboration. It is an intellectual concept embedded in sociocultural, economic and political contexts. The author called for improved working conditions, salaries, favorable employment prospects, union representation and a more supportive infrastructure for improved professionalism and a quality early childhood sector. Additionally, Bankovic for more research exploring professionalism from practitioners’ perspectives to inform and sustain development in the sector.

Campbell-Barr (2014) investigated early childhood teachers’ experiences with and perceptions of the impact of regulatory requirements for teaching, and perceptions of themselves as professionals. The teachers experienced stress and conflict because of external factors like low remuneration, professional isolation, low professional status, and

taxing working conditions. Teachers perceived government regulations as guides for practice and were convinced that regulations were intended to protect and keep children safe. Although regulations were supportive, teachers found the regulations problematic because regulations impinged on teaching, professional sense of self, and passion, and dedication to the field. In discussions at several seminars, an arbitrary narrowing of teaching practice was tabled.

Cottle and Alexander (2014) interviewed early years' practitioners to understand their perspectives on parent partnership, professionalism and quality early years' service, in the historical and political context of the United Kingdom. It was found that although all practitioners considered parent partnerships an essential element of professionalism and quality service; actual partnerships were understood and established in different ways. This was influenced by dominant policy discourses, practitioners' personal and professional histories, and perceptions of the purpose and priorities of the settings. Tensions inherent in changing English policies determined the establishment and sustainability of partnerships that practitioners valued. Einarsdottir et al. (2014) focused on the system level of values in the national curriculum guidelines in Nordic countries that served as the bases of practitioners' pedagogical practices in preschools. The findings revealed that within curriculum guidelines different dimensions and meanings of three values: democracy as being and/or becoming; care as fulfillment of basic needs and ethical relationships; and competence as learning for sociality and academic skills. Those understandings drove practitioners' work and impacted professionalism in unintended ways.

Henderson (2014) examined teachers' learning and its influence on professionalism in ECC's current practice in Australia. The author found invisible barriers were the force driving that learning and professionalism and maintaining a false dichotomy between technical-rationalist discourse present in policy, and perspective of a post-technical-rationalist discourse of teachers' actual practice. The teachers functioned in an 'in-between space' oriented towards experimentation in contact with connecting fields and removing barriers. Thus, classroom practice may be viewed by some as disaligned with and resistant of policy. Yet to others, as teacher autonomy, sound judgement and doing what is best for the children, are key elements of teacher professionalism.

Sisson and Iverson (2014) reported that educational reforms in the North America have led to issues of teacher professionalism and professional expectations being contested at policy and practice levels. Through analysis of narrative inquiry two discourses – professionalism and the caregiver – were identified that illuminated tensions within this context. The researchers examined how those discourses create a double bind leaving preschool teachers with conflicting identities while functioning to fulfill professional expectations. To construct professional identities, teachers in this study used the competing discourses to adapt, deny and rewrite professional positions. Tannang and Abu (2014) investigated teacher professionalism and professional development as practiced in South Sulawesi, Indonesia. The researchers focused on teachers' behavior-attitude, pedagogic skills, and diverse learning activities through effective professional development as commitment to engage in continuous improvement. Tannang and Abu

suggested that professional teachers envinced having exemplary behavior and attitude outside and inside classrooms. Teachers were encouraged to show professional commitment to and responsibility for self improvement to enhance estudnets' learning and professionalism. The authors called for estabalishment of an appropriate system of standards to support and motivate teachers towards the high expectation and professional status.

According to Warren (2014) through professionalization early childhood teachers are positioned within the traditional functionalist view of professionalism that valued qualifictions and knowledge, and neoliberal views as accountable technicians. The author discussed how newly qualified early childhood teachers negotiate realities within three dominant discourses: the authority discourse positioning early childhood teachers as qualified, accountable and knowledgeable; the identity discourse positioning teachers as responsible for shaping professional identities; and the relational professionalism discourse positioning early childhood teachers as relational professionals engaged in warm, trusting and positive relationships. Participants valued relational professionalism more and framed identities and work within that concept. Zembylas (2014) argued for recognition of the emotional aspects of reflexivity to gain insights into the mechanisms within which teacher reflection occurred and became a disciplinary or subversive strategy determining teacher practice and professionalism. The author concluded by advocating for the potential contribution of critical emotional reflexivity as a theoretical and pedagogical tool in teaching, teacher professional development and professionalism.

Case Study Methodology

Several studies in the literature reviewed, employed case study methodology. Some are summarized chronologically from 2018 to 2014 followed by a discussion of similarities and differences among the studies to provide justification for the case study method applied to this investigation.

Albin-Clark et al. (2018) interviewed four teachers to determine how personal and professional identities and experiences influenced teachers' construction of teacher-child relationships. Across the world, teachers who work with young children talked about maintaining relationships with, and care for children as fundamental to practice and professionalism. Those teachers recalled how specific experiences, professional development dialogues with colleagues, and theoretical ideas helped establish strong, caring and ethical relationships with children. The teachers also related personal experiences being a parent or grandparent as guiding those relationships. Thus, teachers' lives are open, networked and overlapping, drove classroom practice and professionalism.

Through 24 hours of video-recorded naturalistic observations of everyday activities in a Swedish preschool; Cekaite and Bergnehr (2018) examined how relational care, interpersonal intimacy and emotional attunement are crucial for children's development and well-being. Additionally, those relational and care constructs are vital elements of professionalism in ECEC. This care study showed that different types of touch were used determined by the situation at hand to comfort children in distress, spontaneously show affection, control of actions, guide participation in activities, and to mitigate educators' verbal discipline. This demonstrated educators' knowledge, attunement with children, and professionalism.

Hedlin, Aberg, and Johansson (2018) interviewed 30 qualified preschool teachers working in Sweden about too much and too little touch, and how that reflects professionalism. The participants reported situations where educators gave children too much touching. The teachers' descriptions involved behaviors that lie out of the preschool mission, teachers who do not set boundaries, and actions that have disadvantages for children and lowered teacher professionalism. Conversely, when educators gave children too little touching were described solely in terms of the teacher's fear or cold personality which also lowered professionalism. This suggested that teachers need to establish a balance in touching – giving sufficient child touch to facilitate children's development and learning, and to showcase professionalism.

Campbell-Barr and Bogatic (2017) reviewed literature to determine the impact of global perspectives of early childhood education and care on the local lives of children, families and the teachers. The authors cited evidence that global perspectives could be constraining (Millei & Gallagher, 2017); generate mixed feelings between welcomed intervention and compromised pedagogical ideals (Kinkead-Clark, 2017); instrumentalized childhood and children (Babic, 2017) or created confused messages about the social welfare function of ECEC (Lundkvist, Nyby, Autto, & Nygard, 2017). Campbell-Barr and Bogatic also observed the global perspectives could offer opportunity to convince government of the need to invest in ECE (Pisani et al., 2017) or raised questions about how early educators are prepared to fulfill the increasing expectations and job demands (Dubovicki & Jukic, 2017; Viskovic & Visnjic Jevtic, 2017; Vujicic & Camber Tambolas, 2017).

Cansoy and Parlar (2017) presented findings from Turkey that evidenced the relationship between schools being professional learning communities, teachers' professional behavior and their professionalism. Cansoy and Parlar suggested sample class presentations, shared experiences on solutions to problems, collaborative meetings, social and leisure time events, observing others' teaching and principals sharing some responsibilities with teachers as ways to convert schools into professional learning communities, drive teachers' professional development and professionalism. Colmer (2017) investigated leadership practices during implementation of policy in Australia and how leadership practices impacted teacher professionalism. The author found that leadership was relational, inclusive and distributed. Professional identity and professionalism grew from professional relationships and shared professional practices that created meaning for the educators. Thus, professionalism was localized and contextualized, and not embedded within the broader profession.

Lewis and West (2017) reviewed ECEC policy documents from two successive governments in England and reported changes in policy that impacted children, parents and teachers. Lewis and West noted that government's austerity measures significantly lowered ECEC program quality in terms of overcrowding and lack of provisions; resulted increased pressure and stress on teachers and lowered professionalism. Logan (2017) reviewed ECEC policy documents in Australia over a 40-year period and found three dominant discourses – community, markets and investments – therein. Those perspectives gave rise to tensions in the ECEC sector because the policies ignored contextual subjectivities that determined how teachers performed of the job duties.

Millei and Gallagher (2017) examined new policy of comprehensive and consistent data qualification, rationalization and reporting in New South Wales preschools. Directors and preschool teachers found themselves engaging in creative strategizing to inform and form policy. Ethical dilemmas emerged as well as material and practical consequences resulted from teacher creativity that impacted professionalism in unintended ways. Millei, Gobby, and Gallagher (2017) continued investigations into State policies in Australia and reported that the government maintained minimal involvement in visionary policy making that would have achieved policy goals. Instead, the state commitment to ECEC was a form of political manoeuvring which placed policy burden on ECEC teachers, silenced and fragmented the sector, and thwarted advocacy for better recognition.

Monk and Phillipson (2017) sought to answer the question: what do early childhood teachers in Asia understand and believe about professionalism and professional status? Early childhood teachers' perspectives of professionalism related to work-life roles, cultural understandings and relationships, focusing on a vision of hope leading to the rising status of early childhood education. Reetu, Rene, and Adarsh (2017) reviewed and described government ECCE policies in India, assessed the reality in ECCE, identified major challenges in quality reform and suggested 10 enablers to achieve policy objectives. The authors found that basic quality standards for ECCE were compromised at various levels that caused major hindrances to improving quality. Reetu, Rene, and Adarsh called for considerable amount of commitment towards quality ECCE from all stakeholders and extending the targeted timeframe beyond 2030 for policy achievement.

Solvason (2017) examined the importance of ethics in early childhood research and professionalism in the United Kingdom. The author argued that in early childhood more than other age groups of education, caring practitioners have tried to stay true to their 'moral work' despite external pressures of accountability. Early educators in the United Kingdom had developed a tacit code of ethics based on values, respect and positive relationships as the basis of quality experiences for children. Additionally, through collaborative relationships based on trust, respect and honesty the spirit of collegiality and professionalism was enhanced.

Bloechliger and Bauer (2016) investigated the impact job resources and job demands had on the well-being and professionalism of early childhood staff at different levels of the sector. Bloechliger and Bauer found that job resources were predicted by structural characteristics connected to professionalism, whereas job demands were dependant of adequate staffing. Those findings suggest the work environments and staffing levels should be targeted to increase job resources and reduce job demands, which would in turn promote staff well-being, lower turnover rates and increase professionalism. Brown, Weber, and Yoon (2016) documented the pedagogical and practical struggles of early educators offered alternative conceptions of teaching that questioned the norms and practices of the high-stakes, neoliberal early childhood system. The findings showed that simply offering teachers alternative to the neoliberal framing of ECE did not lead to implementing curricula change in their classrooms; but only reinforced personal doubts and positions as disposable commodities in the neoliberal early childhood education system. It is therefore critical for early childhood educators to

engage with colleagues in alternative visions for ECEC and develop coalitions that will support efforts for change. Such actions will promote individual and collective professionalism in ECEC.

Campbell-Barr (2016) reviewed the findings of three European studies to juxtapose policy discussions of quality focused on structural features of teacher education such as level and duration; against the literature that demonstrated that quality is more than simply structural. The findings also demonstrated that early childhood practitioners' reports of knowledge, in terms of tangible attitudes were innate for guiding the quality of working with children, and by extension teacher professionalism. Costello and Costello (2016) investigated the impact of implementation of standardized instructional, assessment materials, and emphasis on consistency of prescribed curriculum use, reporting and evaluation on teacher professionalism. Throughout the study, issues of professionalism, emotional impact and teacher resistance surfaced. Costello and Costello found that teacher professionalism was challenged when attempts were made to adhere with fidelity to program processes. However, the authors contended that fidelity to the purpose of a program would allow for teacher decision-making and autonomy within any given context.

Cumming (2016) reviewed current literature that illustrated early educators' well-being and professional identity. The review highlighted that the contextual, relational, systemic and discursive influences on early educators' work and workplace are important for understanding and supporting early educators' well-being, professional identity and professionalism. The author echoed the concerns of Andrew (2015) and Kilderry (2015)

for attending to early educators' well-being as a social justice issues, not only as a function of quality. Harwood and Tukonic (2016) explored Canadian early childhood practitioners' selfconstructed perceptions of professionalism. Harwood and Tukonic found that regardless of education levels, all participants held strong selfconstructions of professionalism. The participants reported high levels of job satisfaction, competence, recognition as professionals from others, and selfrecognition as professionals. The constructions of professionalism those educators held focused on individual qualities considered to be professional. Absent from participants' discussions were the historical, gendered, cultural, racial and social practices of early childhood education; pointing to the limited views of teacher professionalism prevalent in the sector.

Moore and Clarke (2016) conducted a critical exploration of early childhood teachers' attachment to notions of professionalism, and its potential to enable processes whereby teachers obligated to implement centralized, local education policies not believe in. Moore and Clarke argued that since professionalism involved woven past occupational and present organizational discourses; the past facilitated implementation of the present. Thus, holding on to conceptions of professionalism may result in undermining the professional values and beliefs enshrined in professionalism. Peterson et al. (2016) investigated preschool teachers' and principals' ratings of the professionalism of preschool teachers within the cross-cultural context of Estonia, Finland, Sweden and Hungary. Similarities and differences in terms of teachers' education levels and culture. The results of that study showed that the professionalism of preschool teachers needs more support in terms of avoiding gender stereotypes in learning activities, enabling

children to take responsibility for creating a caring growth environment, and encouraging all families to become involved in the learning community. Those results point to implications for teacher education and continued professional development.

Sachs (2016) investigated teacher professionalism 10 years after a call for action for the teaching profession. The author intimated that 10 years ago, different factors were shaping teachers' professional practice and identity, and that the call to action was a metaphor and strategy to mobilize teachers. Sachs identified factors still shaping the teaching profession, and argued that different times required different responses, and that current thinking and debates around teacher professionalism should center around professional learning. Skattebol, Adamson, and Woodrow (2016) reviewed the history of ECEC professionalism that revealed complicated debacles and debates about professional belonging. The authors found that programs that delivered early childhood education and care to children and families in high poverty areas were often excluded from ECEC professional discourses. The researchers drew upon concepts of rationality, emotionality, and criticality in the literature of ECE professionalism, and used data from interviews of ECEC workers in high-poverty communities to develop a report of criticality pertinent to current finding and policy in Australia. Based on those findings, Skattebol, Adamson, and Wodrow argued that the perspectives of those ECEC workers about professionalism should be solicited because it had much to offer broader debates. The knowledge and dispositions required by those professionals went beyond the rationality, emotionality and criticality described in the literature. Those workers drew attention to the need for professionals who could participate and navigate myriad local, national services and

funding systems, and who were politically savvy in both systems and practice knowledge. This was crucial to meet the needs of children and families in high-poverty communities.

Taggart (2016) sought to show how attempts to integrate thought and feelings has resurfaced in care ethics and compassion research, to enhance understanding of the work early childhood teachers do. Taggart proposed that a feminist approach to ethics, as socially critical and psychologically affective, has significant relevance to professional identity and teacher professionalism in ECEC. Compassion has both sociological and psychological connotations, underpins the ethical dimension of work in ECEC, whilst negating false dichotomies between conversations regarding ‘children’s rights’ and ‘care’. Care ethics and compassionate pedagogy are embedded in the daily practices of early childhood teachers.

Van Laere and Vandebroek (2016) posited that the views of early childhood professionals are absent from educare debates, embracing those perspectives is crucial to understanding educare, and the integration of education and care is under pressure because of international schoolification tendencies. Van Laere and Vandebroek contended that due to this hierarchy between education and care, preschool teachers constructed a technical, distant conception of professionalism which has been severely criticized. The researchers stated that ECEC needs a more normative professionalism in which the use of emotions and values of professional actions have a focal place. Watson and Michael (2016) examined how education policy and constructions of teacher professionalism were translated and implemented at local level. Watson and Michael reported that the linguistic and material enactments of policy as a series of translations in

which teacher practices emerged and unfolded in unpredictable ways; in some cases, lowered teacher professionalism whilst in other cases teacher professionalism was increased.

Andrew (2015) critically examined the push for professionalism in childcare and evidenced that the move advanced particular classed forms of cultural capital and made other forms invisible. The participants showed ambivalence towards the process of professionalization and were frustrated by the lack of financial and cultural recognition their work received. Childcare workers viewed emotional and relational skills very important, but this opposed traditional definitions of professional skills by researchers and policymakers. Andrew argued for a new concept of childcare expertise. One that acknowledged the gendered and classed histories of workers and the significant worth of working with young children.

Jackson's (2015) data suggested that the concept of quality could be elusive and dynamic, and that positive relationships, open dialogue, and critical reflection were essential to developing shared understanding that enabled responsive services for children and families. There was no single way to develop shared vision and a sense of ownership. Some early childhood centers experimented with strategies to promote shared understanding and role clarity. Practitioners acknowledged that quality should be defined according to measurable, standardized-outcomes in the current political climate. However, the practitioners appreciated the vital role of resources, physical space, and funding in providing conditions for these processes. Jackson called for resolution of those issues at policy level.

Pacini-Ketchabaw et al. (2015) offered professional dialogue as an important aspect of professionalism for early childhood teachers. The teachers reported encountering challenges related to anxiety and lack of time and discussed how those challenges could be alleviated. Teachers felt more comfortable when protocols introduced: established ground rules to guide discussions; built a trusting environment in which respect and listening flourished; and where differences were opportunities to learn, rather than reasons to argue and defend inflexible positions. Although time remained a challenge, teachers were generally eager to participate in professional dialogue if they perceived the benefits outweighed discomforts. The teachers perceived those benefits as: greater understanding of colleagues; team building; being able to connect teaching philosophy to teaching practice in meaningful ways; and a chance to reflect on and gain fresh insight into teaching practices. Those researchers contended that engaging in professional dialogue was an aspect of professionalism worthy of further consideration.

Hordern (2014, 2016) argued for professionalism in early childhood to be grounded upon notions of professional community and professional knowledge. Thus, conceived, professionalism then was shaped by relations between the social and the epistemic in which specific professional knowledge is given precedence according to the different organizations, institutions and public groups involved. Hordern argued that shared practices that recognized the validity of specific types of knowledge was required to move professionalism in early childhood forward. Hordern emphasized the social interaction requirement from disciplinary communities often were adopted and adapted by professionalized occupations. The author concluded that this type of professional

community that could drive professionalism in early childhood was challenged by the fragmented nature of the workforce, organizational diversity, and government's role. The integration of ECCE systems could offer opportunities for development of shared conceptions of knowledge, on the other hand, split systems led to fragmentation but greater specialization. Specialization may illuminate the diversity of early childhood practice but may be detrimental to advancing the entire sector as professional.

Sims, Forrest, Semann, and Slattery (2014) reported how 351 early childhood leaders (ECLs) understood leadership, given the international expectations, that those leaders would advance quality improvements via mentoring and modeling aligned to distributive leadership. The researchers found many ECLs entered into leadership positions by accident and were ill equipped for the role. More difficulties and dissonance arose because of prevailing perspectives of the leadership model many followed. This prevented "re-conceptualization of leadership in a new socially constructed form" (p. 149); and impacted the ability to facilitate quality improvements. The ECLs viewed relational elements of the role more important than critiquing current quality praxis (Davis, 2014). Sims, Forrest, Semann, and Slattery (2014) concluded that since ECLs performed a vital role in developing understandings of quality and of leadership by the profession, the absence of early childhood leaders from the debates was of concern.

The researches, Davis (2014) and Sumon, Owen, and Hollingworth (2015) called for center managers, government agencies and policymakers to continually assess and improve work conditions, offer further education, and support continuous dialogue regarding pedagogical issue in daily work. The researchers also felt this required priority

enforcement of lower child-to-staff-ratios; employing more staff as substitutes or teaching assistants to allow teachers more time to plan and prepare for continuous interaction with children.

Inclusive of other current research studies, the case study methodologies summarized above were similar in terms of data analyses in that patterns in the data evolved into themes that through triangulation and aggregation collapsed into the broader topics, used for discussions of the findings and implications. Some case studies also called for eliciting practitioners' voices to better understand professionalism in early (Andrew, 2015; Bloechliger & Bauer, 2016; Davis, 2014; Harwood & Tukonic, 2016; Hordern, 2014, 2016; Sachs, 2016; Skattebol, Adamson, & Woodrow, 2016). Some studies found that official constructions of professionalism were in stark contrast to practitioners' perspectives of professionalism in EC (Dunlop, 2015; Hordern, 2014, 2016; Moore & Clarke, 2016; Peterson et al., 2016; Taggart, 2016; Van Laere & Vanderbroeck, 2016).

Another group of studies found that official reform mandates did not reflect stakeholder collaboration and practitioners' perceptions of working in EC (Bloechliger & Bauer, 2016; Costello & Costello, 2016; Davis, 2014; Hordern, 2014, 2016; Millei, Gobby, & Gallagher, 2017; Moore & Clarke, 2016; Skattebol, Adamson, & Woodrow, 2016; Taggart, 2016; Trodd & Dickerson, 2018; Watson & Michael, 2016). Yet other studies found government mandated reforms beneficial to quality EC program provisions, and educators' status, working conditions, and pay (Bankovic, 2014; Davis, 2014; Hui et al., 2017). Finally, some case studies called for further research into all other issues

relating to professionalism in, and the professionalization of the ECCE sector (Andrew, 2015; Campbell-Barr & Bogatic, 2017; Davis, 2014; Hordern, 2016; Hunkin, 2018; Logan, 2017; Monk & Phillipson, 2017; Peterson et al., 2016; Reetu, Renu, & Adarsh, 2017; Sims, Forrest, Semann, & Slattery, 2015; Taggart, 2016; Trodd & Dickenson, 2018; Warren, 2014).

Differences among those case studies also surfaced in relation to positive impacts of government mandates (Perryman, Ball, & Maguire, 2017; Trodd & Dickerson, 2018); and negative impacts (Andrew, 2015; Bloechliger & Bauer, 2016; Cumming, 2016; Logan, 2017; Millei & Gallagher, 2017; Moore & Clarke, 2016; Moss, 2014, 2015; Osgood, 2016; Sims, Forrest, Semann, & Slattery, 2015; Skattebol, Adamson, & Woodrow, 2016; Taggart, 2016). A few studies examined early childhood literature on the construction of professional identity (Celkaite & Bergnehr, 2018; Hedlin, Aberg, & Johansson, 2018).

A variety of data collection strategies were utilized across case studies: interviews alone (Albin-Clark et al., 2018; Andrew, 2015; Brown, Weber, & Yoon, 2016; Fenech & Lotz, 2018; Hedlin, Aberg, & Johansson, 2018). Interviews with focus groups (Colmer, 2017; Cottle & Alexander, 2014; Luff & Kanyal, 2015; Moore & Clarke, 2016; Osgood, 2016; Taggart, 2016; Warren, 2014). Focus groups alone (Cumming, 2015; Trodd & Dickenson, 2018; Van Laere & Vanderbroeck, 2016). Classroom observations and interviews (Perryman, Ball, & Maguire, 2017). Mining official documents and policy review (Cumming, Sumsion, & Wong, 2015; Everiss, Hill, & Meade, 2017; Hui et al., 2017; Hunkin, 2018; Lewis & West, 2017; Logan, 2017; Lloyd, 2015; Millei, Gobby, &

Gallagher, 2017; Moss, 2015; Murphy, 2015; Peeters, 2015; Reetu, Renu, & Adarsh, 2017; Urban, 2015; Watson & Michael, 2016).

Reviewing bodies of literature (Bankovic, 2014; Bloechliger & Bauer, 2016; Brown, Lan, & Jeong, 2015; Campbell-Barr & Bogatic, 2017; Campbell-Barr, 2016; Chalke, 2013; Creasy, 2015; Clausen, 2015; Cumming, 2016; Hordern, 2014, 2016; Skattebol, Adamson, & Woodrow, 2016; Zembylas, 2014). Videos, observations, reflective journals (Cekaite & Bergnehr, 2018; Millei & Gallagher, 2017; Sisson & Iverson, 2014; Solvason, 2017). Pictures, artifacts (Monk & Phillipson, 2017; Tennhoft, Nentwich, & Vogt, 2017); and survey questionnaires (Bloechliger & Bauer, 2016; Cansoy & Parlar, 2017; Costello & Costello, 2016; Foong et al., 2018; Peterson et al., 2016; Sims, Forrest, Semann, & Slattery, 2015, Sims & Pedey, 2015). Across those studies, data analysis employed an interpretative, intuitive orientation through discourse, content, and language analysis in its entirety or partially.

Moore, Almeida, and Barnes (2018) and other studies used a mixed-methods approach in which case study application drove the qualitative phase (Campbell-Barr, Georgeson, & Varga, 2015; Costello & Costello, 2016; Einarsdottir et al., 2014; Harwood & Tukonic, 2016; Tanang & Abu, 2014). Some case studies sampled individual practitioners (Henderson, 2014; Skattebol, Adamson, & Woodrow, 2016; Taggart, 2016; Watson & Michael, 2016; Warren, 2014). Other studies reviewed national government mandated reform documents (Andrew, 2015; Ang, 2014; Bankovic, 2014; Campbell-Barr, 2014; Einarsdottir et al., 2014; Hordern, 2016; Moore & Clarke, 2016; Osgood, 2016; Sachs, 2016). Another group of researchers selected national early childhood

education systems (Andrew, 2015; Oberhuemer, 2015; Osgood, 2016; Sims, Forrest, Semann, & Slattery, 2015; Warrens, 2014). Several studies made no call for further research into issues of professionalism in the early childhood sector, but recommended changes needed therein (Ang, 2014; Bankovic, 2014; Bloechliger & Bauer, 2016; Brown, Weber, & Yoon, 2016; Cansoy & Parlar, 2017; Costello & Costello, 2016; Everiss, Hill, & Meade, 2017; Foong et al., 2018; Harwood & Tukonic, 2016; Hedlin, Aberg, & Johansson, 2018; Monk & Phillipson, 2017; Moore, Almeida, & Barnes, 2018; Oberhuemer, 2018; Peeters, 2015; Peterson et al., 2016; Robson & Martin, 2019; Skattebol, Adamson, & Woodrow, 2016).

Three Official Documents in Trinidad and Tobago

In Trinidad and Tobago three government documents: The National Policy on Early Childhood Care and Education: Standards for Regulating Early Childhood Services (2005b); the National Early Childhood Care and Education Draft Curriculum Guide: Nurturing Three and Four-Year Old Children Towards the Ideals (2006); and The National School Code of Conduct (2009) outlined service provision, practitioners' work and conduct in ECCE to align this foundational stage of education to national strategic development goals. Two of those official documents were derived from applying the ideals and principles of the NAEYC Code of Ethics.

In Trinidad and Tobago, the education policies enshrined in the official documents mentioned above were derived from the findings and call for action by the World Education Forum (2000), under the theme Education for All. From that forum, countries developed Millennium Goals which were the overarching policies driving all

other dispensations. The government pulled together interested parties – stakeholders in education, who had been informed of the forum’s recommendations and Millennium Goals, presented conceptions and lofty ideas of policies to guide and reform the national education system, starting from early childhood to tertiary education – thus creating a seamless education system. Diverse, contentious ideas were presented and debated, resulting in the more vocal, dominant views become the accepted discourse that shaped how education policies were crafted – the language of policies in the Green Paper (2005a).

This Green Paper went through a series of public consultations via community meetings in each education district. Views expressed therein, were intended to inform adjustments in the policies, to reflect public views and inputs in development of the White Paper (2005b) before it went to Cabinet for approval and ratification as legislature. In Trinidad and Tobago, there is little connection between the National Policy on ECCE, the Draft National Curriculum Guide, and the classroom reality of ECCE nationwide. A summary of the major principles enshrined in each document follows.

National School Code of Conduct (NSCC)

It is the MOE’s belief that school is an appropriate setting for all children to learn and develop holistically. As school settings promoted values of responsibility, respect, civility, academic experience in a safe, learning and teaching environment. The National School Code of Conduct (NSCC) supported this concept and comprised principles, standards of behavior, responsibilities, student and staff expectations, roles of school personnel, consequences for violation inclusive of prevention and intervention strategies

with reference to guidelines and regulations under the Education Act, national policies, and circular memoranda. The MOE ensured that each principal in consultation with staff, students and parents, implement the NSCC with sensitivity to diversity and the school's cultural environment. School personnel referred to therein included all students and adults whose roles place them in contact with students in school settings and activities.

Some principles of the NSCC were expectations of school personnel (referred to as 'teachers' henceforth) regarding: One, respect – exhibit respect for the rights, property, and safety of themselves and others. Two, responsibility – accept personal responsibility for teacher behavior to maintain a safe and productive learning environment. Three, rights – honor the rights of others through learning and demonstrating appropriate behavior in the context of social responsibility. Four, integrity – treat each other in fairness and honor, and adhere to all applicable policies of the MOE. Teachers should also be honest in performance of duties and with each other. Five, courtesy – treat each other and stakeholders in a manner that maintains each other's dignity. Six, productivity and Performance – subscribe to excellence in all aspects of work acknowledging each other's contributions. Those principles are supported by several sections in the Education Act.

Since the focus for this study is the teacher, only principles specific to teachers and inherent responsibilities are presented. The penultimate principle relating to teachers according to the NSCC is that: teachers should consistently conduct themselves in a manner that would not bring the service into disrepute. Teachers are therefore responsible for: regular attendance; being punctual and prepared to perform duties; treating each

student with dignity and respect; creating healthy, nurturing, and safe environments for students; consistently foster and model school expectations, guidelines, rules, and regulations; review with students school's regulations, guidelines, rules, and regulations; establish a culture of appropriate behavior conducive to effective classroom learning; reward and recognize appropriate behavior, and communicate with students and parents if students' behavior is inappropriate; promptly report continuing student misbehavior, and any misbehavior that could result in suspension or expulsion; report any suspected child abuse or situation of neglect according to the Children's Act and Sexual Offences Amendment Act 2000; and adhere to the outlined dress code.

The dress code advised teachers to dress in a manner consistent with the dignity and honor of the teaching profession. Teachers were expected to remember being exemplars and role models for the students, and that respect is gained through personal comportment. In general, the teacher should always be clean and well groomed; clothing and footwear should be neat, clean, in good repair, and appropriate for body type. Footwear should be consistent with clothing and overall appearance. Makeup, jewelry and all clothing should be appropriate for the school and not distract from the learning environment. Teachers should avoid excessive, inappropriate display of body form; revealing necklines and dress/skirt slits; inappropriate lengths of skirts/dresses/trousers; excessive use of perfume or cologne; exposed undergarments or see through tops. Principals must offer these guidelines to new teachers.

A range of consequences for teachers who were in breach of the NSCC were stipulated, and a procedure for pursuance outlined in keeping with the Public Service

Commission Regulations, Chapter 1: 01, as amended by the Public Service Commission (Amendment) Regulations 1990. Permanent secretaries and heads of departments were given jurisdiction to hear and determine acts of misconduct by civil servants. Permanent secretaries were required to report to the director of personnel administration any allegations of misconduct or indiscipline made against teachers. Heads of divisions and principals were required to submit comprehensive reports on the allegations of misconduct or indiscipline committed by members of the staff to the permanent secretary for further action. To prevent incidents from progressing to levels requiring more serious disciplinary action, however, respective officers and/or administrators could address acts of misconduct relative to poor job performance and work conduct, through a process of progressive discipline. Procedural steps in progressive discipline included counseling, verbal warning, written warning, and disciplinary actions, in accordance with the Public Service Commission Regulations, as detailed in Circular Memorandum Number 37 dated March 31st 2004. The NSCC did not contain the words professional and professionalism; however, its principles and expectations of teachers sought to professionalize that workforce.

The National Policy/Standards Document: White Paper

Concerned about regulating ECCE services in Trinidad and Tobago, the MOE created a team of 19 regional and local stakeholders including a legal advisor, who over a 3 day period, discussed the status of early childhood services (ECS), clarified systems, and identified resources for monitoring and supporting ECS nationwide. An Early Childhood Regulatory framework developed by Saint Lucia was used as a pattern for

developing the first national integrated standards document. After 3 days, a first draft was presented by the ECCE Unit to the National Council for Early Childhood Care and Education (NCECCE) for discussion, and amendments were made. The then minister of education launched the draft document in May 2003. In attendance were, approximately 80 stakeholders representing a cross section of the population including media personnel.

Following the launch, the draft document was made available to the public and highlighted electronically. During June 2003, the Draft Standards Document benefitted from nationwide consultation and focus group discussions with early childhood service providers, ECCE teachers/caregivers, and other stakeholders in education. Recommendations recorded and those submitted were collated, analyzed, and recommendations for amendment made to the NCECCE, who after lengthy discussions agreed on amendments. The minister approved the amended draft document in July 2003. Cabinet noted the contents of the Draft Document, agreed to launching a Green Paper on the Proposed Standards for Regulating Early Childhood Services, and the hosting of consultation with the wider community. The Draft White Paper was the nucleus for the MOE's creation of legislation for ECS, to support universal access to high quality education for 3 and 4-year-old children in Trinidad and Tobago.

Principles underlying ECCE in Trinidad and Tobago were that all children can learn, and each child regardless of economic status, physical or emotional challenges, ethnic background or gender, has a right to high quality education. The curriculum at ECCE centers should be developmentally appropriate, meet the needs of children, and take into account children's lived environment. Curriculum should be implemented

through meaningful activities that linked home-life, family and community needs, and experiences rather than presented as knowledge to be acquired. Links among homes, the wider community and ECCE centers are thus a primary concern of ECS providers.

Those regulations represented minimum standards and were guided by international and regional agreements and national legislation and were designed to ensure that all service providers nationwide, regardless of affiliation (public or private) offered a safe and stimulating environment in which children could develop and learn according to individual needs and abilities. The ideal is that good quality came from internal motivation within each ECCE center to raise standards above the minimum. The legislation provided statements to be applied by the MOE/NCECCE in deciding on suitability of ECS in Trinidad and Tobago. Section two of the document outlined the following staffing criteria in terms of personal suitability, levels of staffing, qualifications of staff, personal practice, and written policies and procedures.

Regarding personal suitability, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago had to satisfy itself that persons who applied for or were registered as ECS providers were fit. Furthermore, any person employed or living on the premises is fit to be in the proximity of young children. It was also stated that all staff and anyone aged 16 years and over who lived and worked on the premises used or who came into regular contact with children; must get legal clearance to work at an ECCE center by obtaining a police certificate of good character. Applicants were advised of not being registered if selves, or any person coming into regular contact with children on the premises had ever been convicted of drug related offences or acts of violence. It is stipulated that no obscene language should

be used. Levels of staffing instructed ECS providers to employ adequate numbers of qualified staff to meet each child's individual needs. The staff/child ratio required should not be higher than: Birth to 2 years - one staff to four children; 2 years to 3 years – one staff to six children; 3 years to 4 years – one staff to a maximum of 15 children. A caveat, where children with special needs are attending, lower staff ratios would be necessary and negotiated on an individual basis.

Staff qualifications statements were that teachers must be appropriately qualified for working with children of age groups described in section two, and in accordance with the career path for ECE. The career path for ECE allowed for progression from early childhood teacher to early childhood principal. The proposed career path with academic and professional requirements were: ECCE teacher – five ordinary level passes inclusive of english and mathematics, and a professional certification as stipulated by the MOE; and ECCE principal – same as ECCE teacher in addition to a bachelor's degree in Education with ECCE specialization and eight years teaching experience. Qualified staff must have competencies in: Growth and child development in EC; all domains of development; play as an instrument of learning; life skills; the context of communities; organizational and financial management procedures; administration; health, safety and nutrition of the young child; child protection issues; equal opportunities; special needs of children; working cooperatively with parents/caregivers, families and the community; and teacher professionalism.

Statements about personnel practice mandated the registered provider to develop written personnel policies that delineated recruitment and selection procedures. All staff

must be given an employment contract and job description that outlined general and specific duties and accountability. Discipline and grievance procedures should be included within, and written agreements made available for regular volunteers, students, and interns. A handbook of clearly written policies and procedures that clarified and reinforced expectations and responsibilities of staff to maintain good standards of practice must be available. The standards document and regulating legislation did not articulate how teacher professionalism is conceptualized therein, even though qualified ECCE staff were required to have appropriate competencies in teacher professionalism. Noticeably absent from the standards document are the words: passion, care, love, although it spoke to nurturing relationships with young children, and establishing partnerships with parents and communities. A masculine, marketized, distal conception of how ECCE professionals are to function is outlined. In Trinidad and Tobago, the term teacher professionalism is therefore, open to individual interpretation and application.

The Draft National ECCE Curriculum Guide

According to Trinidad and Tobago's then minister of education, the country's education system is fast becoming a relevant and quality system capable of responding to 21st century demands, as it sets a strong foundation for continuous improvement starting with the ECCE level. In the quest for excellence, the draft curriculum guide offers the best possibilities for young children to acquire the knowledge, skill, dispositions, and feelings essential to becoming life-long learners and responsible citizens of our democracy (Manning, 2006). The MOE was proud to launch the first National Early Childhood Care and Education Curriculum Guide, which encapsulated government's

vision that human development was fundamental to national success, and ECCE was the platform upon which that success was built. In the foreword written by Wright (2006), mention was made of curriculum reform as the key initiative of the government's human development mandate. Another catalyst was national concerns about the proliferation of variations in curricula and teaching materials inappropriate for 3 and 4-year-old children.

Implementation of the curriculum guide was expected to emphasize professional development extending beyond the MOE and districts to the communities and every ECCE Center nationwide. The intention was that lessons learnt during the 2 year phased implementation, from consultation with experts in the field and other stakeholders; would have led to changes, the creation of resources using indigenous materials and recyclables, and sample themes and projects developed by practitioners. Through consensus, adoption of a common pedagogical approach ensuring high quality ECCE programs relevant to the 21st century would be achieved. The intended phased implementation of the National ECCE Curriculum Guide had not occurred, neither the promised consultations. The document was still a draft minimally implemented at government ECCE centers, and disregarded by private ECCE establishments (D. Khan, personal communication, December 2011). Although implementation of the Draft National Curriculum Guide would have facilitated professional development and professionalism, clear statements of what those concepts entailed, and how those were conceived is not articulated therein.

The Draft National ECCE Curriculum Guide represented a major step in the reform process and is based upon the assumption that exposure to rich, high quality early childhood experiences during those formative years would result in positive learning

outcomes for all children. The document did not seek to provide a rigid structure for delivery, but clarified, explained and provided guidelines informing practice and the context for implementation. It facilitated curriculum planning and guided ECCE teachers in the: creation of stimulating environments; selection of appropriate materials; use of effective strategies; guidance of children's behavior; establishment of effectively partnerships with parents; adapting to the special needs of children and families; and continued incorporation of current research findings. The draft curriculum guide encouraged ECCE teachers to think seriously about the purpose of ECCE, question traditional practices, and transform classroom environments into warm and inviting centers of excellence for all 3 and 4-year-old children (Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, 2006).

An analysis of the three official documents underpinning legislation that regulated the ECCE workforce, implied that teacher professionalism in the Trinidad and Tobago's ECCE context referred to: One, being qualified and certified in ECCE by a government recognized institution. Two, adherence to all policies and guidelines delineated in the National School Code of Conduct. Three, meeting all the regulatory requirements for service provision. Four, implementing the draft national curriculum guide, engaging in the developmentally appropriate practices outlined therein, and providing feedback to the MOE. This represented a neoliberal, marketized view of teacher professionalism. Also lacking from those documents are articulations of the meaning of quality, high quality, teacher professionalism, and professionalism in ECCE specific to the national context.

Another deficit is the dearth of monitoring and supporting systems for accountability, evaluation, and ongoing organizational and systematic development.

The Trinidad and Tobago Context

The twin island republic, Trinidad and Tobago is located at coordinates latitude 10° 40' north, and longitude 61° 31' west, seven miles off the north east coast of the South American mainland. It is the last island at the southern end of the Caribbean archipelago, and therefore stands as a key hemispheric gateway. Trinidad and Tobago is inhabited by a population of approximately 1.3 million people on a combined land mass of 5, 128 km. To the indigenous Amerindian Arawak and Carib people from the South American Orinoco delta region, Trinidad was known as Kairi; the Land of the Humming Bird, and Tobago was called Tavaco, the probable origin of the Spanish word tobacco, which in turn provided the English word tobacco. The people of Trinidad and Tobago are represented in a broad demographic amalgamation distributed among the predominant East Indian and African descendant groupings, complemented by significant numbers claiming origins from British, Spanish, French, Chinese, Syrian, Lebanese, Portuguese, Italian, Amerindian, and an assortment of mixed ancestries (Boodoosingh & Guadeloupe, 2012).

Throughout history, fate triggered an awesome immigration pattern to Trinidad and Tobago's shores for adventure, commercial pursuits, exploitation, seeking a haven from social persecution, and other diverse reasons. Each group of travelers brought its own set of social complexes, which continues to contribute to creating the unique Trinidadian and Tobagonian identity. The conquests of the Amerindians were early

forerunners to the European colonists, and the accompanying enslaved labor-force. Upon the abolition of slavery, the labor force was replaced by East Indian indentureship. Because of the indentureship package of land, housing, and wages received, East Indians and descendants were given a better start to life with the resultant effect of the East Indian group generally forming of the higher socio-economic bracket (Boodoosingh & Guadeloupe, 2012).

The abolition of slavery in the 18th century marked the beginning of public education in Trinidad and Tobago. The country, unlike other Caribbean islands, did not have any pre-emancipation schools or formal education, because society was made up of immigrants and conflicting nationalities, who were either skilled, plantation owners, or unskilled laborers, and slaves (Campbell, 1997). After emancipation, the British model of education was adopted and introduced by the colonial masters. No indigenous, traditional education existed to oppose the watered-down British model prescribed. Education then, meant conversion to Christianity, improved Christian moral standards, cementing denominational loyalty, and providing literacy. Promotion to upward social mobility was not intended, since the colony depended upon a plantation labor force (Campbell, 1997).

In 1849, the first effort at teacher training was approved by government and in 1852 the first government teacher training (Micro Charity Training) school, for male teachers was opened (Campbell, 1992). In 1856, 4 years later a female teacher training school opened. This proved problematic, as there were no jobs for female teachers in the education system. The school's policy was to train teachers regardless of religious affiliation on a Protestant system, which excluded denominational creeds. An analysis of

the government teaching training program offered then by Campbell (1992) revealed that distinction could be made between general education and professional training. Therefore, from 1852 to the present, curriculum at teacher training schools had been amended to attain the correct equilibrium between these two objectives. The pattern was for very poor general education to co-exist with no professional training, or for poor informal in-service training to be provided by clerics outside of specialized institution. Thus, the academic standard at the Trinidad Micro Charity Training School was low. Graduates exited with a combination of inadequate professional training and poor general education (Campbell, 1992).

The seventeen years between 1852 and 1869 produced 50 trained male teachers, and only six female teachers. According to Campbell (1992) a visiting British expert, Patrick Keenan, did not like the teacher preparation at those training schools, and recommended they be closed. Campbell also recommended that future teachers be trained by serving a 5-year apprenticeship as pupil teachers in very good elementary schools. The colony already had an unsystematically used pupil teacher system. People in that system were unpaid, senior pupils called monitors who assisted teachers with junior children. In return, teachers were to give monitors extra tuition, and in time, some monitors became teachers without taking the teacher credentialing examination.

According to Campbell (1992), Keenan also recommended that teacher training required recognized standards based on examinations, and that pupil teachers form a resource pool for the teaching service. Henceforth, a teacher certificate examination was inaugurated by government, and permission given for the opening of denominational

teacher training schools. The 20th century dawned with myriad problems in teacher training. A large percentage of head teachers and assistant teachers had passed the teacher training examination without attending any training institution. The training of teachers was splintered among many small training schools (Campbell, 1992). In 1916, an Education Commission decreed that to raise standards, all denominational schools should be closed, and selected youth given bursaries to get a secondary education before attending the government teacher training college.

During the 1920s and 1930s modernization of the elementary school curriculum was paralleled by developments in teacher training. The government training college became converted to a reputable training institution whose graduates could claim higher status than those teachers who had simply passed the teacher certificate examinations, without attending the government training college. An enduring legacy of reform during that period was that teacher trainees had a secondary education before pursuing teacher training. Emphasis was placed upon professional training, and on imparting appropriate methods to cope with children in schools. Thus, the government teacher training college adopted higher standards of general education and of professional training (Campbell, 1992).

Those higher standards for professional teacher training were articulated in the Draft Educational Development Plan 1968- 1983, which outlined the curriculum for teacher training at the teachers' colleges as a guide, framed so as not to circumscribe the lecturer. Lecturers were to use initiative, be enterprising, and employ means necessary to deliver the syllabus in the context of its spirit and conception. Lecturers were free to

deviate from content to motivate and fulfill the aims and objectives of education complimentary to the development of Trinidad and Tobago. That was the genesis of the nation's current problems in education. Curriculum at the teachers' colleges was therefore, subjected to individual lecturers' beliefs and values; implying that different groups of prospective teachers received different curricula focus (Campbell, 1992).

The teacher education program comprised four groups of studies. Of interest to this inquiry is the group of professional studies, which were designed to: One, provide student teachers with an appreciation of the calling through interaction with and discussion of the profound thinking of more distinguished educators. Two, provide awareness of the theory and practice of the profession. Three, insight into the development of children and processes of learning. Four, knowledge and understanding of the complex social situation which education must adequately serve. Five, skills of the profession. Six, opportunities for personal development. And seven, confidence to discharge teaching responsibilities with efficiency, imagination, and insight (Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, 1968). This was outlined in the 1968 draft plan for the development of the country's education sector.

Professional studies were compulsory and constituted the fundamental principles and knowledge on which education is based. These studies were to be delivered in ways which helped teachers to serve the whole child through component parts comprised of: the philosophy, psychology and principles of education; the organization and practice of education; and sociology – a study of human relationships with special reference to Trinidad and Tobago's educational context. Essential to that professional training was

practical work, including teaching practice, visits to different educational institutions, first-hand observation of children, testing and experimental assessment in classrooms, which led to understandings of the behavior and development of children (Ministry of Education, 1968). This was articulated in the 1968 draft plan for the development of the country's education sector.

History and Development of Early Childhood in Trinidad and Tobago

It was not until the beginning of the 19th century that the education of young children was thought of as distinct from the primary and secondary education levels. In fact, Gordon and Browne (2017) pointed out that in ancient times, children were considered adults by age seven. The view that young children needed special attention and consideration was not recognized. In Trinidad and Tobago, the primary school was the beginning of education, and the care of young children was traditionally the responsibility of the family. This changed through the impact of global industrial growth and economic decline, when mothers who traditionally cared for young children joined the workforce; some, in an attempt to supplement the family income, others through necessity. Family structure also changed becoming more nuclear oriented. Thus, in the absence of the extended family and free support services from neighbors and friends, there was a demand for childcare services outside the home.

This demand facilitated the establishment of preschools, which were at that time referred to as private schools. Those private enterprises were managed by untrained individuals, in conditions that were not suitable. According to Logie (1995), private schools in Trinidad and Tobago were accommodated in one room, in the gallery, or under

the house of the proprietor teacher's home. Sometimes, the school was housed in a shed erected in the yard. Very often, the teacher was a housewife or young woman with limited knowledge of teaching techniques or child psychology, development, growth, and learning. Logie reported that primary school teachers often complained that entrants from these private schools had to be retaught basic foundational skills, before teaching the primary school syllabus could take place. The concern had been that many of those preschool teachers were retired teachers from primary schools, highly respected in the villages, but with no training specific to the under five age group. Consequently, when those persons were not too tired, (having served up to the stipulated age of 60, in the government service), the methods of teaching employed were quite formal, and more suitable for older children.

Other efforts at early childhood care and education service was the nursery school established by Audrey Jeffers in San Fernando in 1934. Other childcare services were provided by the Trinidad and Tobago Nursery Association, which was established in 1945, and provided social services for low-income mothers. These early childhood services operated with scarce resources, minimal funding, and untrained staff. The staff in those settings offered custodial care at low rates that were often unpaid. When any teaching occurred, it was of a formalized nature with emphasis on the 3Rs: reading, writing, and arithmetic (Logie, 1995).

The above conditions, inclusive of low school fees that were hardly affordable, impacted negatively on pre-school education. Logie (2006) cited Whitebook, Howes, and Phillips (1989) who believed that low compensation was a factor associated with those

poor quality programs. Logie also cited the works of Carnegie Corporation of New York (1994) that singled out such poor quality settings for infants and toddlers as being especially troubling because of the potentially lasting negative impact on children. Education planners, however, continued to view the education of children under five as the responsibility of the family, as was evidenced in the Report of the Working Party to the MOE (1954). The Report stated that something should be done for children under five, in terms of parents making appropriate contributions towards the care of children in nurseries.

That report is important to the early childhood fraternity, bearing in mind that the role of preschools and the expectations placed upon educational outcomes cannot be extracted from the political arena. Logie (1995) endorsed this view, by pointed out in the historical report prepared for a Trinidad and Tobago Early Childhood Survey, that “educational philosophies which govern educational practices are embedded in the societal and political histories of the country” (p. 1-2). Those views are congruent with Elkind’s (1986) statement that people’s conception of children at any point in history had been more dependent on societal, political, and economic situations than on established facts and theories of child development. Views of early childhood education, however, slowly began to improve on the political and societal fronts. The 1954 Maurice Report to the MOE (1954) briefly recognized the need to address education of the 3 to 5-year-old group. The report mentioned that government should provide educational facilities for children 3 years of age.

According to Logie (1995), The Private School Ordinance of 1961 addressed the school environment, and required private schools (including pre-schools) to register with the MOE. The MOE was responsible for ensuring that schools conformed to proper standards in relation to the nature of buildings, toilet facilities, accommodation, furniture, and staffing. Noticeably absent were standards set out for the curriculum to be implemented. In 1963, the San Fernando Model Nursery School was established. The school was the brainchild of the elected parliamentary representative for the area who seized the opportunity to use this as a model, fashioned according to a book about preschool education. Because of political affiliation, the parliamentary representative was able to acquire 50% input from the government, with the other fifty percent operating cost coming from the community. This school still operates to date, as one of the government ECCE Centers in the national early childhood care and education program. The school is managed by an administrator/teacher who functions as the centre supervisor and reports to the MOE.

In the 1970s, through funds from the Van Leer Foundation, an international philanthropic organization, a pilot nursery school was established at the La Pastora Community Center (Logie, 1995). By the 1980s, Trinidad and Tobago had 50 such centers operating in communities through partnerships between the government and Village Councils. Administrators of these preschools reported to the Preschool Unit of the MOE, which was set up in 1974. Also, in the 1970s, a nongovernmental, grassroots support organization called SERVOL, established its first early childhood center, independent of the government and other existing programs. SERVOL's philosophy was

one of community participation, parental involvement, and home visits by center staff.

The SERVOL organization continued to be a thriving operation up to current time. Field officers who worked in specific geographic locations monitored the organization's work and reported to SERVOL's Head Office located in the capital city of Port of Spain.

SERVOL devised a curriculum emphasizing the holistic development of young children which is known by the popular acronym SPICES (Logie, 1995)

Despite these changes, the education of young children was still seen as custodial, a view reiterated in official documents. In 1980, a Report on Nursery Education laid in Parliament, described education of the young child as nursery education. Nursery education covered the period 3 to 5 years of age and differed from subsequent education in that its main focus is the physical and emotional wellbeing and welfare of the child (Ministry of Education, 1980). Because of increasing demand for preschool education, private establishments grew and flourished unabated. Some aspired to provide educational services, but most served as custodial centers.

During the period 1986 to 1991, SERVOL partnered with the government and received assistance for the preschools. In 1995, SERVOL was given additional responsibility for training both government and SERVOL teachers to work in the nation's 148 preschools. Although over 700 privately operated preschools existed in Trinidad alone, there was no compulsory teacher training program for the staff. More than half of those privately owned preschools were unregistered. Many of the staff, however, voluntarily sought training by attending courses offered from other institutions that may or may not have been accredited. (G. Pantin, personal communication, May 16, 2013).

There was now heightened awareness of early childhood care and education. The Education Plan (1985-1990) allocated a large section to the ECCE sector, but deemphasized a previous thrust towards “quality” education. The 1985-1990 plans were opposed to the former Draft Education Plan (1968-1983) which only mentioned one of 26 major points in favor of early childhood education, despite its emphasis on “quality” and education for all MOE (1985). In the Policy Paper (1993-2003), The National Task Force on Education, frowned on the “level of subvention for ECCE its preferred title, as being only 0.15%. The Task Force saw this as “an indication of how lightly ECCE was regarded as the foundation of the entire educational development of the child” (Logie, 2006, p. 44). The Task Force recommended that this subvention be at least doubled, and also recommended a number of issues to be addressed, in a bid to increase the quality of ECCE, in keeping with the national thrust for quality education. Those recommendations were of major importance to the development of quality ECCE programs nationwide. The Task Force recommended among other things, that transition into primary school be gradual in content and method and completed within three years so that formal education could be initiated. The primary school would then cater to the holistic development of all children to facilitate achievement of full potential.

Emphasis was placed on hands-on learning experiences, and therefore specified what the primary school curriculum should reflect; which was: learning in all traditional subject areas through active involvement with peers and adults; opportunities for cooperation and problem solving behaviors; initiative and selfempowerment; and learning activities and materials that were concrete, real, and relevant to children’s lives

(Logie, 2006). The characteristic nature of the primary school child in terms of having variable maturation rates; attention spans, emotional shifts, and multi intelligences, coupled with parental involvement and partnership drove those recommendations. Acting on the advice of the Task Force, The National Council for Early Childhood Care and Education was reestablished in 1994 and comprised of representatives from various interest groups. The Council is a Cabinet appointed committee whose membership was revived every three years. The council operated with clear terms of reference regarding management and monitoring of ECCE nationwide, and upon re-convening continued developing and institutionalizing policies for the ECCE sector.

In an effort to improve the education and care of children in the zero to 5 age range, the government of Trinidad and Tobago commissioned the High Scope Educational Research Foundation to conduct a nationwide Early Childhood Survey in 1995. According to Logie and Weikart (1995) the survey investigated the experiences provided by nature, and the quality and effects of formal school. The report indicated that there was need for modifications and emphasized that changes must start at teacher training level, as this would enable changes in teacher behavior and practice. Resultant from the survey's report, the MOE coordinated and facilitated a Training of Trainers Workshop. That workshop attempted to review, revise, and harmonize the approaches and methodologies used by the leading ECCE teacher training institutions in Trinidad and Tobago; namely SERVOL, and the UWI/School of Continuing Studies, the Extra Mural arm of the UWI, as well as the MOE. It was hoped that this would impact positively on

the development of curriculum and pedagogical approaches in ECCE centers and strengthen the capacity of trainers.

Concerns about transition from ECCE to the first year of primary school, in addition to, implementing widespread use of developmentally appropriate approaches to learning and teaching in early childhood, led to the initiation of a harmonized ECCE teacher training program. Through that harmonized program, trainees would be better equipped to operationalize ECCE facilities. Most of these facilities were either built or upgraded via a government program to increase access to and space in, early childhood facilities in low-income, rural communities (Logie, 2006).

The harmonized training program was conducted through the state's agents, SERVOL and the UWI/ School of Continuing Studies. Those institutions offered a full time ECCE certificate program, in which student teachers spent the first year in classrooms in study of general theory, philosophy, child development, and psychology related to ECCE. In year 1, student teachers visited various preschool establishments for observation and a 6-week teaching practice exercise. Written examinations were administered at the end of year 1. In year 2, student teachers embarked upon a 1-year internship period, were assigned to a preschool to practice classroom teaching and management learnt, especially aspects of professionalism required in ECCE. Interns were monitored by field officers and supervisors, who evaluated teaching performance. Student teachers needed to attain a pass grade of 50% both in theory and practice before being certified as an early childhood teacher (V. Cropper, personal communication, December 2012).

Early Childhood Care and Education: Context and Culture

The evidence presented in the foregoing historical overview showed that as recent as 25 years ago, the care and education of young children was not the major focus of the government agenda in Trinidad and Tobago. ECE was viewed as a custodial service, distinctly different from what was considered the more important beginning of education in the primary school; where it was believed that true work, teaching and learning really began. Currently, much of this has changed. Data supplied by the Central Statistical Office showed that in 1992, 43% of women aged 25-34 were employed (Central Statistical Office, (1995). This figure is being updated and on completion will most likely reflect an increased female workforce. SERVOL also identified that large numbers of mothers were seeking employment away from the home. Some even going abroad, leaving off-springs in the care of grandparents, and other relatives who more often were unable to care for the children properly, and to adequately provide quality educational need (Pantin, 1979).

The essential question facing policymakers is how to increase access to ECCE facilities, and simultaneously increase the quality of service offered. Service or program quality is an indicator of teacher quality that in turn is an element of teacher professionalism. Teacher quality and teacher professionalism are valued by parents and seen as key enablers of children's learning, academic performance, and educational outcomes. Private ECCE centers continued to flourish, but now when seeking places in early childhood programs for children, parents were more selective about the ECCE centers in which children were enrolled. Parents sought places at ECCE centers which

were perceived as being able to help children secure places in what was considered to be 'prestige' primary schools (Pantin, 1979).

Logie (1995) pointed out that preschools had been used as a strategy for reducing poverty and deprivation, countering under achievement in education, and promoting equality of educational opportunity. Parents were no longer satisfied with only custodial care in those settings. Logie emphasized, parents did not generally separate the demands for care and education. The parents wanted both elements in the same program, in a convenient location, and at an affordable price. Parents believed that high teacher professionalism resulted in higher program quality, which in turn provided avenues through which poverty and deprivation could be reduced, under-achievement minimized, and equality educational opportunity enhanced.

Logie (1995) admitted that there was a growing concern by parents about children's transition into primary school upon exit from Early Childhood Care and Education Centers. Because of the Secondary Entrance Assessment (SEA), parents were very anxious for early academic performance. This anxiety was further perpetuated by the Continuous Assessment Program (CAP), which was used along with the results from the placement examination to assess children for secondary school. This assessment system demanded early grading of children 7 years old, when in standard one at primary schools. Consequently, the early childhood group is expected to attain high academic performance, as the passport to a good primary school, and a prerequisite to passing the SEA to a better – high quality secondary school.

Pressure is therefore, exerted downwards, as parents place more demands on teachers in ECCE to ensure that children achieve high academic performance. Similarly, primary school principals claimed that schools were judged by SEA examination results. Therefore, those principals enrolled children believed to have greater academic exposure at ECCE, manifested by reading and writing at admission interviews. Little thought is given to the other domains of development like, physical, social, emotional, moral, and creative domains, which were espoused by ECEs to being equally important as the intellectual domain (V. Cropper, personal communication, December 2012).

This societal trend, forced administrators of the ECCE centers to stress academics, specifically reading, writing, and arithmetic because increasingly, parents sought ECCE centers that offered those services. The MOE did not support this 'hurrying' of young children. And because of verbal reports about the testing of 5-year olds for entry into primary school, some investigation was conducted. Officers of the Preschool Education Division participated in team visits to 50 primary schools during the period September 1995 to March 1996. Attention was focused on activities in the infant department in particular, the program to effect smooth transition from ECCE to the first-year class in the primary school. A report was prepared by the school supervisor of the preschool division. It identified findings in the following areas: selection for admission, type of program, and book requisition. Strengths and weaknesses as well as limitations were identified (Logie, 1995). Yet, the MOE did nothing to discontinue the practice of testing 5-year old children for selection to enter primary schools.

The impact of diverse meanings and conceptualizations of early childhood care and education had not been studied in any developing country like Trinidad and Tobago. Government mandates dictating what early educators must do, when and how things should be done, have been handed down in Trinidad and Tobago through The National Standards for the Regulation of Early Childhood Services (2005). However, those mandates are generic and ambiguous. The standards do not articulate how diversity should be handled or criteria relating to professionalism in early childhood, and therefore were subjected to personal interpretation. The above named government mandates required adherence to and fidelity in implementation, as criteria relating to professionalism within the early childhood sector. Additionally, early educators had not been offered opportunities to voice concerns about government mandates, and how working with young children is impacted.

Three official documents guide early childhood care and education practices and service delivery in Trinidad and Tobago: The National Standards for Regulating the Provision of Early Childhood Services (2005b), The Draft National Curriculum Guide (2006), and The School Code of Conduct (2009). Each document was read many times over, but a precise definition of teacher professionalism was not found in any, only limited descriptions of: professional practice, behavior, attire, a career lattice, and general job specifications and descriptions were identified (see Appendix K). Early childhood practitioners were told what was expected in work settings. One document, the School Code of Conduct (2009), did not speak specifically to early childhood practitioners, but

was general to all teachers and spoke to the following elements of teacher professionalism.

All teachers are expected to comply with and obey those guidelines: “Attire - all teachers are to dress professionally – female teachers’ skirts should be below the knee, blouses should not have plunging necklines, dresses not form fitting and or revealing, and shoes should be closed. Male teachers should wear shirts inside trousers with appropriate closed shoes. Behavior – all teachers should behave in a manner befitting the profession at all times and should do nothing that brings the profession into disrepute. Teachers should show concern for and treat all pupils fairly and are expected to interact respectfully with all pupils, colleagues, parents, administration, and other stakeholders. Obscene and or defamatory language should not be used. Professional practice - all teachers should be regular and punctual on the job – Monday to Friday during the scheduled school days as deemed by the MOE, except in the case of illness – verified by a medical certificate after two consecutive days of absence from school. Teachers should arrive at school half an hour before the official start of school. Teachers should plan and deliver lessons to pupils according to the school syllabus. Each pupil should be provided with equal opportunities to learn and develop positive social relationships at school. All teachers should remember being role models for pupils and therefore, conduct duties accordingly in respectful cooperation with school administration” (Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, 2009, p. 3-12).

Additionally, the National Standards (2005b) outlined the following essential elements of staffing at an early childhood center: “All staff must get legal clearance to

work at an ECCE Center by obtaining a police certificate of good character; all staff at government and government assisted Centers must be registered at the Ministry of Education. Qualifications – the teacher must be appropriately qualified – have a bachelor’s degree in ECCE or bachelor’s degree in Education with specialization in ECCE, and at least 5-years’ experience as a teacher” (p. 4-9), see Appendix K. These elements serve as an official frame of teacher professionalism in Trinidad and Tobago’s ECCE sector and relate to research question one regarding an official definition of professionalism; although a definition is not specifically articulated in any official document. However, official concerns about and calls for increased professionalism in the ECCE sector are derived from observed and reported noncompliance to any of those elements and guidelines and provided context and a data source for this study. For example, many teachers have not yet earned a degree in ECCE (Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, 2014). Some ECCE teachers are dressed inappropriately, in very tight, short and sometimes revealing attire; untrained staff do not consistently plan developmentally appropriate activities and experiences for children; some ECCE teachers arrive at centers late; and others are absent, frequently taking a ‘day off’ from work (ECCE Centers’ Monthly Reports, 2014, 2015). One daily newspaper reported EC teachers’ inappropriate interactions with, lack of care for, and negligence in supervision of children (Guardian Newspaper, 2014, 2016).

The official documents suggest that early educators in Trinidad and Tobago are public servants, expected to do the bidding of policy makers and society. The specialized knowledge attained should be used to implement standards and the curriculum, as spelt

out in the documents. Some of the requirements did not reflect early educators' professional views about what was best for young children's growth, development, and learning. Teachers were not expected to talk back, to have an opinion. This study provided an avenue to make early educators' voices and opinions heard. Those practitioners engaged in dialogue, clarified the meaning of professionalism in early childhood education, shared classroom practices, and responses to government mandates for increased professionalism. This study filled gaps in the literature and added to the body of knowledge.

The early childhood landscape in Trinidad and Tobago had not been investigated in terms of the impact of government mandates for increased professionalism and how early educators responded to those mandates. In Trinidad and Tobago, early childhood care and education services and programs were delivered at three levels of a split system. The first level, nursery or daycare served young children birth to age 3; the second level, preschool or early childhood care and education served children 3 to 5 years old; and at the third early childhood level in primary schools, children 5 to 8 years were served. Practitioners operating within each level had credentials ranging from no specialized qualifications, a basic certificate in childcare, a basic certificate in early childhood, a bachelor's degree in early childhood, and a master's degree in curriculum or other fields like youth and family services, and guidance and counseling. No official definition of professionalism was found in government mandates and policies regarding early childhood care and education.

This study is needed because myriad problems exist within the early childhood sector that is in abeyance. Practitioners are divided between two camps: acquiring representation from the Teachers' Union or lobbying for the cause. Protests and demonstrations mounted by the Teachers' Union and the practitioner camps, thus far had not resulted in expected salary increases, employment of graduates in early childhood centers, and ongoing dialogue with government officials. Rather, a spate of training and retraining programs had been mandated. The timing of those programs is problematic, because early childhood practitioners, who traditionally were on vacation, were mandated to participate in a bridging program until the end of July 2013. The impact of new and prior mandates; and the complexities of Trinidad and Tobago's early childhood care and education system had not been investigated. Therefore, practitioners' voices needed to be elicited, to explore and understand professional plight, and the impact of government mandates on personal and professional lives. This study is worthwhile and of vital importance to Trinidad and Tobago, other developing nations, and the global early childhood landscape.

The precursory historical narrative of early childhood care and education in Trinidad and Tobago provided the backdrop against which professionalism in early childhood was investigated. Given the Trinidad and Tobago context, this study illuminated the professional and personal experiences of ECCE practitioners in this developing nation. The study not only provided hope to practitioners, but reduced feelings of 'aloneness'; affirmed and validated practitioners' work with young children; voiced experiences and responses to government mandates for increased professionalism,

and actively positioned Trinidad and Tobago within the international discourse on professionalism.

Summary

A review of current literature on professionalism in early childhood care and education revealed six major themes: One, differing constructions of professionalism; two, increasing ECCE quality as the rationale for government mandates; three, positive impacts of government mandates; four, negative impacts of government mandates; five, alternative conceptions of professionalism; and six, the importance of a code of ethics. Contained in the reviewed literature was a predominance of qualitative inquiry, diverse conceptual frameworks, interviewing early childhood practitioners to elicit voices and perspectives of professionalism, and how those were constructed (Elwick et al., 2017; Fenech & Lotz, 2018; Luff & Kanyal, 2015; Monk & Phillipson, 2017; Taggart, 2016; Trodd & Dickenson, 2018; Warren, 2014). The literature called for further research into early childhood professionals' construction of professionalism (Creasy, 2015; Brown, Lan, & Jeong, 2015; Henderson, 2014; Tennhoff, Nentwich, & Vogt, 2015; Oberhuemer, 2018). Other researchers advocated eliciting practitioners' voices at all levels of the workforce, to gain a better understanding of professionalism in the context, and factors which impacted it (Cumming, Sumsion, & Wong, 2015; Foong et al., 2018; Hordern, 2016; Osgood, 2016; Sisson & Iverson, 2014; Tanang, & Abu, 2014; Taggart, 2016). This study filled the gap, by eliciting practitioners' voices about professionalism and provided insights into how it is impacted by government mandates. It added to the

literature regarding early educators' perspectives of professionalism in the sector, and how responses to government mandates for increased professionalism.

Key findings included: global, demographic, social, and economic pressures at macro and micro levels impacted the work contexts of early childhood educators (Foong et al., 2018; Monk & Phillipson, 2017; Oberhuemer, 2018; Tanang & Abu, 2014; Urban, 2014). Together with increased movement towards expansion and regulation of the field, expectations were intensifying (Ang, 2014; Bankovic, 2014; Cumming, 2016; Hunkin, 2018; Moss, 2015; Oberhuemer, 2018; Taggart, 2016; Urban, 2015). Resulting in government mandated policy, goals and targets generating restructuring of national qualification systems for working in early childhood, and directing what workers did in performance of classroom duties (Albin-Clark et al., 2018; Bleach, 2014; Campbell-Barr, 2016; Colstello & Costello, 2016; Moore & Clarke, 2016; Watson & Michael, 2016).

In many countries, diversities and varieties in systems, requirements, qualifications, duties, work contexts, cultural and social views, and expectations, determined how early educators' work was valued (Brown, Weber, & Yoon, 2016; Everiss, Hill, & Meade, 2017; Osgood, 2016; Perryman et al., 2017; Robson & Martin, 2019; Sims & Pedey, 2015; Urban, 2015). Very few government mandates considered and/or reflected early educators' views of professionalism in early childhood, how professionalism is developed and could be enhanced. Yet those documents called for and drove the process of professionalism (Cumming, 2015; Hunkin, 2018; Lazzari, 2014; Lloyd, 2015; Murphy, 2015; Oberhuemer, 2018; Sachs, 2016; Urban, 2015). Early childhood practitioners, consequently, were under increasing pressure to adhere to

accountability demands despite having to also respond effectively to young children's developmental and educational needs (Bloechliger & Bauer, 2016; Brown, Lan, & Jeong, 2015; Cottle & Alexander, 2014; Lewis & West, 2017; Urban, 2015; Watson & Michael, 2016).

Absent from the literature is the case of early childhood care and education in developing countries, particularly the Trinidad and Tobago's context. There is no research study about professionalism in Trinidad and Tobago's early childhood care and education sector. The literature addressed the early childhood workforce, which comprise of all persons working in all types of early childhood services, but various countries classified those services and personnel differently, therefore, finding similar classifications to the Trinidad and Tobago workforce was futile. There was no literature that spoke specifically to the professionalism of early educators working with 3 to 5-year old children. A variety of theories and methodological approaches were presented in the literature reviewed, but none employed Fullan's (2007) change in practice, together with Senge's (2006) systems thinking as frameworks for investigating professionalism in early childhood, through eliciting practitioners' voices.

Those gaps provided space for positioning this case study, in that it focused on eliciting the voices of early childhood practitioners working specifically with 3 to 5 year olds. In this study, the case is the Trinidad and Tobago context; therefore, the situation in Trinidad and Tobago is the primary focus and unit of analysis. Consequently, the methodology described in Chapter 3, which follows, outlined how this study filled gaps in the literature. The findings and information generated from this inquiry made a very

significant contribution to the existing body of literature, and the international debate on professionalism in early childhood care and education.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore early childhood practitioners' perspectives of government mandates, particularly the implementation of the national standards and draft curriculum guide and how those mandates impacted practitioners' personal and professional lives. The study was also designed to elicit views about improvements that could be made in the sector to address professionalism. Through gathering this data, a deeper understanding of practitioners' views of professionalism and the differences between practitioners' perspectives and officials' conceptions of professionalism was obtained. The information provided can be used to promote a better understanding of the diverse views of professionalism held by practitioners, how government mandates were interpreted and implemented, and professionalism demonstrated.

This chapter is organized into five sections in which I delineate the methodological plan of the study. In the first section, Research Design and Rationale, includes the research questions, subquestions, and the research approach. In the second section, Role of the Researcher, I define my position in terms of data collection and analysis, inclusive of biases and ethical considerations. To facilitate replication and for transparency, the Methodology section includes an outline of the data collection procedures employed in the study. I also discuss the sampling procedures and processes through which the data were analyzed. This section is followed by Issues of Trustworthiness section in which I speak specifically to credibility, transferability,

dependability, confirmability, and ethical procedures. The chapter concludes with a summary section.

Research Design and Rationale

The research questions driving this qualitative case study were derived from the myriad problems of professionalism in Trinidad and Tobago's ECCE sector and from current literature revealing global issues impacting early childhood practitioners' professionalism. The perspectives of early childhood practitioners in Trinidad and Tobago needed to be better understood in order to inform dialogue around this topic. That dialogue will generate collaboration to improve professionalism in that sector and promote positive social change through improved outcomes for the children being served. This study was guided by the following central research question:

What does the term *teacher professionalism* as defined in government mandates enshrined in the National Standards and Draft Curriculum Guide mean to early childhood practitioners?

The study also addressed the following research subquestions:

1. In what ways did early childhood practitioners' definitions of professionalism differ from official definitions?
2. In the view of practitioners, how did government mandates impact professionalism and the personal lives of early childhood practitioners?
3. How did early childhood practitioners think those impacts should be addressed?

The perceptions and experiences of early childhood practitioners were central to understanding responses to government mandates for increased professionalism and in forging practitioner dialogue to generate change and improvement in the sector. Because eliciting practitioners' voices, thinking, and experiences deepened understanding of the issues and tensions they confronted, I selected a case study approach for this study. The focus of this case study was eliciting the voices of practitioners to share the issues and experiences encountered within the lived, bounded program. Therefore, my role as researcher was to use my knowledge of the Trinidad and Tobago early childhood landscape to help elicit practitioners' deepest thoughts and ideas and engage practitioners in discussions about professionalism and how professionalism could be improved in early childhood.

This was an explanatory, qualitative case study. In case studies, researchers are involved in exploring and explaining a real-life, contemporary, bounded system (i.e., a case) or multiple bounded systems (i.e., cases) over time through detailed, in-depth data collection techniques, using multiple sources of information, like observations, interviews, audiovisual materials, documents, and reports, to present a case description, case themes, and to explain the case (see Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2002; Yin, 2009). The unit of analysis could be multiple cases or a single case. The unit of analysis in this case study was the situation in Trinidad and Tobago's ECCE sector. This intrinsic case study was conducted with a small group of 12 early childhood practitioners or teachers who were recommended by teacher educators at one of the teacher training institutions in Trinidad and Tobago. The case study was intrinsic because it illustrated a

unique case that has unusual interest in and of itself. Such a study has not been undertaken in a developing, Caribbean economy like Trinidad and Tobago and needed to be described and explained in detail (see Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2002; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2009).

In a qualitative study, theory is used differently from a quantitative or mixed methods inquiry. Theory served as a road map that guided this qualitative study, the rationale for such an inquiry, and a tool in data analysis. In this instance, theory did not work deductively to prove or disprove hypotheses. Theories are used in qualitative studies as broad explanations of events and provide a lens for looking at participants' experiences and realities to inform the study (Berg, 2007; Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2001; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). In this case study, I used theory to chart the way forward because it provided a focus for understanding, analyzing, and interpreting the data. The theories helped me explain how a change in practice, thinking, and the establishment and sustainability of supportive systems for continued professional development of early childhood practitioners could be achieved (see Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Patton, 2002).

Maxwell (2013) described the conceptual framework of a study as combining the researcher's knowledge and experience with published research and theory about the subject under inquiry. For the purposes of this study, I used theory to attain a rich understanding and explanation of how early childhood practitioners responded to government mandates for increased professionalism, perspectives on professionalism, classroom practice, and how changes should be made for a supportive and sustainable

system. The results of this study can be used to enable better outcomes for young children.

I applied Fullan's (2007) theory of change throughout the study to explore why government mandates did not bring about the intended changes and to use the findings to explain how government mandates could be better implemented in ECCE. Additionally, I applied the theory of change to share early childhood practitioners' understandings of how the early childhood sector could be developed and the challenges of sustaining program development. Senge's (1990) theory of the learning organization was also applied in this study. A singular theory would have been insufficient to account for the dynamic nature of professionalism in ECCE in Trinidad and Tobago and what should be done to generate change and improvement therein. Maxwell (2013) cautioned against complete reliance on the literature because this may influence the researcher's interpretation of the case. Denzin and Lincoln (2005) advised case researchers to employ the best thinking and reflection on what the thick data indicated was going on. In this way, researchers are committed to thinking about impressions, deliberating on recollections and records, not necessarily following the ideas of theorists, participants, and audiences. Using case inquiry, researchers dig into meanings, working assiduously to relate meaning to contexts and experiences, and engage in reflection.

Although the selection of a case study was based on the problem statement, the purpose of the study, and the research questions, other qualitative approaches could have been used for this investigation. The twofold purpose of my research was to understand early childhood practitioners' professionalism and response to government mandates for

increased professionalism as well as to engage practitioners in dialogue about professionalism. Using the broad categories of qualitative approaches delineated by Creswell (2013) and Patton (2002), I will provide justification for conducting a case study inquiry and my reasons for not selecting an interpretative phenomenological analysis or grounded theory design in the following paragraphs.

An interpretative phenomenological analysis design might have been the next logical approach for this type of investigation, because it would have uncovered strategies and behaviors that early childhood practitioners developed to cope with government mandates, despite challenges in the work contexts and varying levels of training. Although phenomenology is similar to an intrinsic case study, I would have had difficulty in my current situation conducting an investigation that required the researcher to experience the phenomenon as directly as possible. Since shared experience was not possible in this case, the assumption of core meanings, mutually understood through a commonly experienced phenomenon was inappropriate. Thus, the meanings practitioners made of experiences were different to the meanings I made of mine. This is so because practitioners and I operate at very different levels of the system, and have different levels of education, knowledge, experiences, skills, and dispositions.

Grounded theory might have been another suitable approach for an inquiry of this nature, because very little was known about professionalism in early childhood care and education, in the Trinidad and Tobago context. It would also have been very difficult in my current situation to coordinate a research study requiring extensive data collection, for the purpose of generating a theory. The timeframe within which my study needed to be

completed did not allow utility of this approach. Before theory can be generated, a deep understanding of all elements of the phenomenon should be attained; so this study is at best, an early first step towards later theory development. Therefore, there is need for some prior investigations from which a broader, overarching model could be derived.

My intimate knowledge of the field and some participants, over whom I did not have authority, and triangulation of data helped minimize bias and allowed a measure of detachment, which added to the integrity of the study. My background in early childhood care and education through teacher training, program design, implementation, monitoring, and actual classroom practice, meant that I brought assumptions to the study. I did not want those elements to interfere with my interactions with participants. I have assumptions about best practice in early childhood classrooms, and educator quality, but I have not been directly active at ECCE centers for the past 10 years. I did not know the details of what has and continues to happen there; practitioners' views of professionalism; and how practitioners' have and are coping with government mandates. I did not want to analyze second hand data or to speculate based on survey responses. I also thought that I could not understand or answer the research questions without interviewing early childhood practitioners.

Role of the Researcher

My role as researcher was to interview, facilitate focus group meetings, and ask follow up, probing questions about early childhood practitioners' views of professionalism. This allowed me to explore the impact of government mandates, and how practitioners coped with those mandates in classrooms. The process began by

obtaining a Letter of Cooperation to conduct the study from the MOE, and four tertiary education institutions, engaged as state agents in the education of early childhood practitioners or teachers (see Appendix A). I then obtained permission from the Institution Review Board (IRB) before approaching participants. Upon receiving IRB approval, I contacted the head of the early childhood departments at the four teacher education institutions about participating in the study, by recommending three practitioners I could interview. Unfortunately, only one early childhood teacher education institution agreed to cooperate in the study. From the graduate list provided by that institution, I e-mailed and mailed invitation to participate in research flyers to the home addresses of 29 graduates from 2004, see invitation to participate in research as in Appendix B. Within 1 day I received e-mail responses from 25 prospective participants. I created a list of those names in order of the time at which responses were lodged on my computer. Thereafter, I selected the first 12 names on that list and the other names were locked away in my filing cabinet should any be required for use in secondary sampling, in case any participant were to withdraw from or decline to participate in the study.

I responded to each e-mail thanking respondents for interest in the study. I also requested the first 12 to provide a date, time, and location at which to meet for further discussion about the study. The remaining 13 were informed that individual responses appeared after the first 12, but each could be contacted if any of that group decided not to participate. At that first meeting, I discussed the study's scope, presented each prospective participant with a detailed consent form that I collected at the first interview. See inform consent form as in Appendix C. An interview schedule was created with

participants who also decided on the time and location for each interview. I provided participants with the interview protocol, at that meeting. This gave each participant time to think about experiences, and establish rapport through openness (see Maxwell, 2013; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Patton, 2002).

Agreement to meet for the first interview at a location that is convenient, comfortable, and private for each participant was finalised. I collected data from the perspectives of each participant at two semistructured interviews and two focus group meetings. The interviews were loosely structured which allowed participants to select and speak about impactful issues, to delve deeply into and share those experiences (see Patton, 2002, Stake, 1995, Yin, 2010). The first focus group meeting was also loosely structured. Therein, participants expanded upon issues tabled at the interviews; added to or clarified information; discussed different perspectives; and responded to additional questions.

I established rapport through casual conversation in the days leading up and prior to conducting each interview. This minimized apprehension and encouraged each participant to talk freely about the work and experiences (see Miles & Huberman, 1994; Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2001; Berg, 2007). I minimized my bias as a teacher educator, by bracketing my feelings and thoughts throughout the process. Bracketing is a method used not to suppress one's biases, but to acknowledge and refer to those biases throughout the study (Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2002; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Saldana, 2013). Manual analysis involved coding and interpreting the data, using bracketing and triangulation across data sets. I thus minimized inaccurate findings as the study evolved,

which led to new directions and to deeper understandings (Saldana, 2013). Contact with the early childhood practitioners prior to the study had been indirect; except for when I supervised student teachers from the University of Trinidad and Tobago who engaged the teaching practice component of their training at some ECCE centers in Trinidad. I held no authority over any participant. All participants knew that I am a teacher educator, at the University of Trinidad and Tobago, because that is public record.

Methodology

The organization of this section includes the rationale for the selection of participants for the study, instrumentation, procedures for recruitment of participants, and issues of trustworthiness. Each section includes supporting information in sufficient detail, to provide readers with the procedures and processes necessary, to recreate or extend the study. This section concludes with a comprehensive data analysis plan.

Participant Selection Logic

Upon receipt of signed Letters of Cooperation from one teacher education institution in Trinidad and Tobago, a purposive sample of 12 early childhood practitioners who have been working at ECCE centers for 10 years was attained. Those individuals comprised of practitioners – early childhood teachers, and assistant teachers, who worked with 3 to 5 years old children at government and privately owned and operated ECCE centers. Those prospective participants would provide information relevant to the research questions and goals, which might not be available from other choices (see Creswell, 2013; Maxwell, 2013; Patton, 2002). Those prospective participants were identified through the institutions' student teacher graduation records,

which provided specific information regarding names, dates, and length of service for each prospective participant; and contact information for each graduate on that list. This ensured that prospective participants met the following criteria: worked with children three to five years old, had worked in the ECCE sector for the past 10 years, and possessed specialized training in early childhood care and education. Using the contact information provided, I also telephoned each prospective participant, explained the purpose of the call and confirmed a mutually convenient meeting, at which I invited that individual to participate in the research project. I informed each prospective participant about the study, how it would be conducted, participants' rights and role in the research process; and all other pertinent information.

In this way, an eclectic sampling approach inclusive of stratified, snowball, and maximum variation strategies was used. Those strategies provided subgroups of early childhood practitioners who had varying levels of qualifications, teacher education paths, work experiences, and whose cases are information rich. I therefore acquired diverse stories, variations and data; and important common patterns in thoughts, actions, and experiences (see Miles & Huberman, 1994). This resulted in a sample of 12 participants for the study, represented by Figure 4, which follows below:

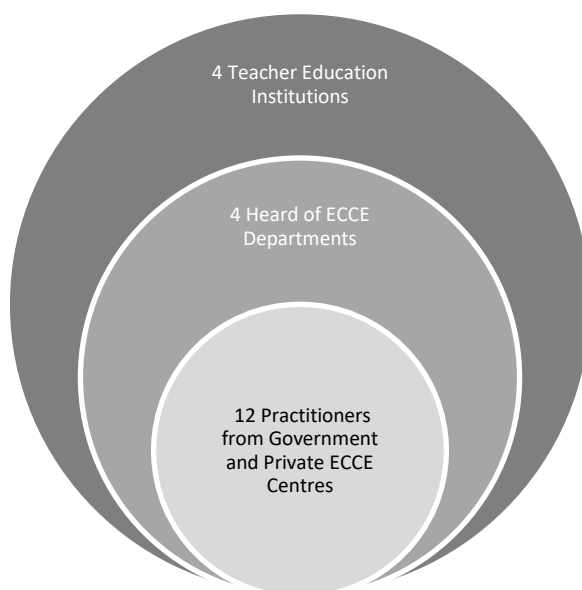


Figure 4. Diagrammatic representation of the participant pool.

Selecting participants using these criteria, as well as ensuring confidence, by protecting individual's participation is crucial in the selection process (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Each practitioner participated voluntarily, without promise of incentive, and without detriment to wellbeing and livelihood. According to Patton (2002) qualitative studies do not specify rules for sample size. Sample size is implied by what the researcher wants to know, the study's purpose, what is useful, beneficial, credible, and what could happen given the time frame and resources. Patton cited Lincoln's and Cuba's (1985) recommendation that sample selection should be to the point of redundancy. Meaning sample size is determined by the amount of information a researcher gathers. Therefore, sampling is ceased when no new information emerges from new sources sampled. Redundancy is the major factor in sample size. Denzin and Lincoln (2005) cited Morse's (1995) definition of saturation, as data adequacy,

operationalized by collecting data until no new information is forthcoming. Those authors continued by stating that researchers use saturation to justify small sample size. The sample is expected to represent some population of cases. The phenomena given, samples were opportunities to study the phenomena.

To answer the research questions, I interviewed the first 12 practitioners who responded to e-mail invitations. Persons with similar or different views, coping strategies and experiences regarding professionalism; who had been working in classrooms at early childhood care and education centers, with children 3 to 5 years old for the past 10 years. Although Creswell (2013), Maxwell (2013), and Patton (2002) recommended a much smaller sample size of no more than 6 or 8 individuals be selected for this type of study; justification for the slightly larger sample I used is the need for an objective, in-depth understanding of what is happening from people who could provide the maximum, rich, thick descriptions required. This voluminous data meant that I needed to create a system and timeline for data record, storage, retrieval, management, and analysis. I therefore, adhered to the timeline, devoted time, and paid meticulous attention to that phase of the study. This ensured high quality data analysis, as I grappled with practical issues of time and resource scarcity.

Participants selected the issues and experiences to speak about. This elucidated perceptions and ideas of professionalism in the ECCE sector and ensured depth and rich detailed data collection and analysis. The only boundary set within the study is government mandates for the 3 to 5 ECCE sector. In that regard, some homogeneity was anticipated, but variance in the issues presented was also expected. Each participant

represented a different ECCE center and had initially accessed training in early childhood education at one teacher education institutions. I hoped that participants would represent different staff levels of the national program. If this failed, and if too few of the sampled prospective participants agreed to participate, further snowball sampling of interested participants from the second list of 13 would have been used to identify other prospective participants.

Instrumentation

Data were collected through interviews, focus groups, artifacts, and participants' journals. The first interview consisted of a 1 hour long, audio recorded, semi-structured session. Each participant was asked the same questions on the interview protocol. I created all of the first interview protocols in collaboration with expert reviewers in Trinidad and Tobago. These instruments comprised of the four research questions, extended by two prompts and relevant probes. See the first interview protocol in Appendix D. The second individual interviews conducted 1 month later, consisted of emerging probes to clarify responses provided by participants in the first interview. See the second interview protocol in Appendix E.

The first focus group involved a review of initial interview data analysis and analysis of the three official documents guiding ECCE practice in Trinidad and Tobago. See the first focus group protocol in Appendix F. The second focus group which occurred three weeks later framed participants' discussions on improving professionalism in Trinidad and Tobago's early childhood sector. See protocol for second focus group in Appendix G. I created all data gathering protocols for the focus groups in collaboration

with expert reviewers in Trinidad and Tobago. The protocols were reviewed and approved by the IRB before use in the field. These processes ensured content validity through review of the sufficiency of data collection instruments to address the four research questions.

Three official documents: The National School Code of Conduct (2009); National Policy on Early Childhood Care and Education (2005b); Standards for Regulating Early Childhood Services in Trinidad and Tobago; and the Draft National Early Childhood Care and Education Curriculum Guide: Nurturing Three and Four-year-old Children towards the Ideal (2006) were used as sources of data. Those government documents delineated expectations of early childhood practitioners' performance in classrooms and are the benchmarks by which professionalism is evaluated. The documents are the legislative framework through which the government sought to professionalize the early childhood workforce. Practitioners are referred to those documents for guidelines to classroom practice. Each practitioner is expected to possess a copy of those documents and copies are available at ECCE centers nationwide (Z. Wright, Personal communication, September 2012). The findings of document analysis were presented to participants at the first focus group meeting for review and feedback. I manipulated the data and made changes based on participants' feedback.

Focus group meetings commenced one month after the last participant was interviewed to allow time for transcribing each interview and giving transcripts to relevant participants for review. Upon return of the first reviewed transcript, I commenced data analysis. At the first focus group meeting, participants: reviewed the

findings of first and second interviews and document analysis findings; changes were made based on practitioners' feedback. The participants manipulated the data to determine a place for discrepant views and responded to additional questions that emerged. Since the data revealed incidents of child abuse, participants decided upon the person to make the report to the MOE and other relevant authorities. I agreed that if contacted, I would provide the authorities with the relevant information.

According to Yin (2009), an important source of case study information is the interview. He referred to interviews as guided conversations, not structured queries; and reiterated that a case study interview required the researcher to operate at two levels: first to satisfy the needs of their research inquiry by asking friendly nonthreatening questions; and then second; to satisfy the needs of the participants. Yin attested that a protocol is a major way of increasing the reliability of a case study, intended to guide the data collection from a single case. The protocol is a set of questions reflecting the study's line of inquiry. Those questions serve as reminders of the information that needs to be collected and why, and specific questions serve as prompts during case study interviews.

Stake (1995) intimated that the principle uses of case studies are for researchers to obtain the descriptions and interpretations of others. The author also presented interviews as the main avenue for acquiring multiple realities. To facilitate this, interviewers were advised to have an advance plan, a short list of issue-oriented questions to get descriptions of an episode, linkage, or explanation. Stake cautioned that the formulation of questions and anticipatory probes that evoked good responses is a special art requiring attention, time, and practice. The author recommended that researchers

should carefully create and record the main questions and probes critical to gathering the rich data needed for the inquiry.

Patton (2002) advanced that the purpose of interviewing was to allow researchers to enter another person's perspective because it is meaningful, knowable and explicit. The author emphasized that the quality of information obtained during an interview depended upon interviewer skill and technique. Of the three approaches to open-ended interviews proposed by Patton, interviews in this study aligned with his standardized open-ended interview, which comprised of a group of carefully organized questions intended to take each respondent through replicated sequences of identical questions. Probes were appropriately placed to minimize interviewer effect through replication, thus reducing interviewer judgment during the process. Data analysis was therefore made easier because respondents' answers to specific questions were located quickly and were easily organized.

Patton (2002), Stake, (1995), and Yin (2009) defined a focus group as an interview of a group of people. This case study utilized individual, standardized open-ended interviews and group interviews which the literature highly recommended as premier data gathering tools for case studies. Additionally, in the current literature reviewed in Chapter 2, individual interviews and group interviews were predominantly the two major data gathering tools used by researchers.

Since the interview and focus group protocols were created in collaboration with local experts in Trinidad and Tobago, before submission to the IRB for further review and approval, the need to test those protocols through a pilot study was negated. The

main purpose of local expert collaboration and review was to validate the reliability of each protocol for gathering the data required, and establish sufficiency of data collection to answer each research question. Through expert collaboration and review I was able to identify questions not asked but were vital to gathering more valid and reliable information, those were included on the protocol. Some questions with potential to silence participants were restructured, and those that did not generate the information required were omitted altogether. Reviewers' recommendations were fed back into the protocols for improvement to the data collection instruments and to assure content validity. Expert collaboration and review also identified more information rich sources for sampling and brought academic rigor to the inquiry. I applied to the IRB for permission to conduct the study, and did so only after approval had been granted.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

I collected data via two rounds of interviews, and two focus group meetings with the 12 participants, artifacts – practitioners' activity plans, official documents, participants' journal of feelings and thoughts, and my journal. All data collection methods employed addressed the four research questions. It was anticipated that data collection events would extend over an approximate 7-month period in keeping with the following schedule: Meetings with the head of ECCE departments over a 2-week period, during which the list of graduates from the institution would be attained. This was followed by initial contact with first to respond prospective participants over another 2-week period.

Two Rounds of Interviews

The first round of interviews occurred thereafter over a 6-week period. I interviewed two individual practitioners each week using the approved protocol. I audio-recorded each interview. Participant review of first transcriptions that occurred simultaneously extended this phase by another 2 weeks. The second round of audio-recorded interviews took up 4 weeks. One month was needed for participant review, and to allow for reading, analysis, and manipulation of the two data sets; and get the data reviewed by local experts.

During the interviews, I paid close attention to time, so that each interview was 1 hour in length. I started each interview by giving a preview that included current student status, the study's title. I reiterated participant's rights to agree or not, to engage in the study; to withdraw at any time with no repercussions or negative consequence; that participants could refuse to answer any question that gave rise to uncomfortable feelings; could change any prior response when reviewing the interview transcript; was entitled to copies of that interview, and the final research report. I assured each participant that names would not be used; neither any information that would identify participants in the research report. I asked each to indicate understanding of participants' rights, the purpose of the interview, and willing to be interviewed for the purposes stated. I provided each participant with contact information, that of the dissertation chair, and head of the IRB, should any concerns arise.

The interview commenced upon verbal assent, at which point the audio recording device was switched on. During each interview, I made brief jottings of participant's reactions (body language) when questions were posed and when answering. I also

recorded other impressions and thoughts during the process. I ended each interview by thanking participants for the time spent and wealth of information shared. Participants were asked to keep a journal of thoughts, ideas, and feelings that surfaced after the first interview, and were reminded to date entries. Each participant was provided with journaling instructions – see Appendix H; a spiral bound notepad and pen with which to record that information. I asked permission to interview each participant a second time, for 1 hour, at the same location or any other preferred site.

I conducted interviews and collected data through audio recordings over a 12-week period. I transcribed each interview verbatim, immediately after. I listened to the recording over and over, typing verbatim what was heard. I read over each transcript and listened to the relevant recording again to ensure accuracy in transcription, before giving to respective participant for review. At a priory agreed date and time, not exceeding 1 week, I collected reviewed transcripts from participants, during which I asked about the journaling, and encouraged each to continue the process and to date each entry. If nothing had been recorded as yet, I asked each to provide a brief overview of thoughts and feelings, which I recorded. The second phase of interviews commenced 1 month after the first when all reviewed transcripts had been collected, analyzed, and feedback used to manipulate data in initial data analysis. At the second interview, each participant was questioned according to the approved protocol (see Appendix E). Clarity and extension was sought by specific reference to particular data vignettes in each transcript. Each participant clarified initial responses, critiqued initial data analysis, responded to questions not asked at the first interview, and any other questions that arose.

A total of 24 weeks at minimum was required for data collection, but a 30-week plan was created to account for any unforeseen delays or contingencies. See Figure 5, which follows below:

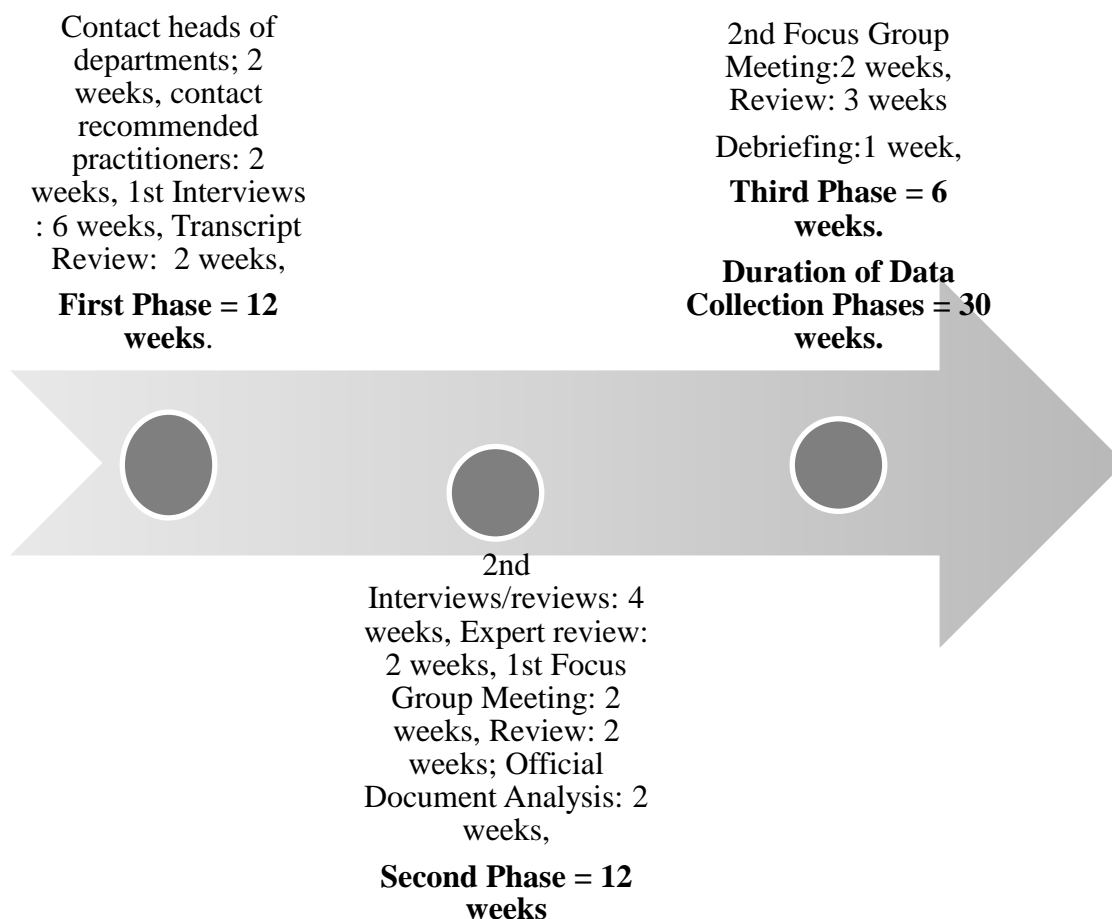


Figure 5. 30-week time line for data collection in phases.

Two Focus Groups

I conducted the first, audio-recorded focus group meeting with 11 participants 4 weeks after the two rounds of interviews were completed. The second focus group meeting which culminated data collection followed 3-week after the first. I hosted a debriefing lunch on the afternoon of the second focus group meeting. The first focus group

meeting was held at the University of Trinidad and Tobago's North Campus, Conference Room, reserved for that event, and was 1-hour long. Each focus group meeting was audio-taped by the hired typist who signed a confidentiality agreement, as seen in Appendix I: Confidentiality agreement – Typist. The information was transcribed verbatim replicating the process used for the interviews, was reviewed and critiqued by participants at the second focus group meeting. At the first focus group meeting, two 48 x 48 inches wall data charts were displayed. One showed analysis of interview data after participant review and feedback. The other showed the findings from analysis of the 3 official documents guiding the national ECCE program. The National School Code of Conduct (2009); National Policy on Early Childhood Care and Education (2005b): Standards for Regulating Early Childhood Services in Trinidad and Tobago; and the Draft National Early Childhood Care and Education Curriculum Guide: Nurturing Three and Four Year Old Children Towards the Ideal (2006). Participants received a file folder package with copies of those displays, writing paper, and pens. The participants reviewed analyzed interview data, data from official documents, shared perspectives and feelings, critiqued, and member checked the data. Practitioners discussed the findings, decided upon alignment with shared views, listed discrepant views, discussed how those should be treated, thoughts and feelings about the data, and responded to emerging questions. Those strategies strengthened content validity and extended initial answers to the four research questions.

The data charts were accompanied by four strategically placed flip charts, labeled Private Centers and Government Centers so representative participants could: write

thoughts, ideas, feelings, and anything else that needed expressing. During analysis the following day, these were cut apart and affixed to respective data sets. Participants provided feedback that was used to manipulate and adjust the data. Discussions focused on data analysis, review, changes, and additions; and how discrepant views had to be treated. These additional sources of data were mined and included in the on-going data analysis. During data analysis, all names and identifiers were erased to autotomize the data, protect participants, and ensure confidentiality. Each focus group meeting began with clear rules for active listening, and respect for the contributions of each participant. I initiated dialogue by giving a brief explanation of how each display was created, and by asking participants to comment on or question the contents.

At the second focus group meeting held 3 weeks after the first, replicating its procedure and tools, participants discussed how professionalism in ECCE could be improved. Responses to research sub-questions 3 and 4 were presented to start discussions. Each participant shared one idea on how professionalism could be improved. The group discussed ideas tabled, shared views and suggestions for improvement in the sector. The participants wrote on available flip charts other ideas and suggestions not tabled. The focus group ended with participants crafting and reading a statement of commitment to improving professionalism in Trinidad and Tobago's ECCE sector.

Participants exited the study via a de-briefing lunch at a restaurant in Tobago, after the second focus group meeting. The De-Briefing lunch protocol (see Appendix J) entailed having the participants share thoughts and feelings about the research, and experiences during that process. I shared initial research findings, encouraged participants

to share ideas about the way forward, and how I should treat those findings. Participants were thanked for participating in the research project and partook of the lunch. I gave each participant a written summary of the research findings, and reiterated willing to answer any questions or engage discussions over the next couple of months.

When the dissertation is accepted, I will inform each participant, and follow the chair's recommendations regarding publication. I will acquire permission from the UTT to present the study to faculty, government officials, and other stakeholders. Participants will be invited to attend those presentations but will not be identified. I intend submitting Abstracts to present the findings of this study at annual conferences of NAECY, and Association for Childhood Education International (ACEI) to which I hold membership.

Data Analysis Plan

The data analysis plan which followed demonstrated how the voluminous raw information collected was sifted to separate trivia from significant, identify and match patterns, and used to construct a thematic framework for communicating what the data uncovered. Patton (2002) cautioned researchers to use the very best intellect to represent the data fairly and tell what it revealed in accordance with the study's purpose. The author explained that the uniqueness of each study required unique analytical approaches based on the skills, insight, capabilities, analytical intellect, and style of the analyst. Patton warned that data analysis may reveal gaps or ambiguities which required more data collection; thus, necessitating interviewees being called upon to clarify or deepen earlier responses. Those clarifications were fed back into data analysis.

An inductive data analytical design inclusive of categorical aggregation that necessitated the following sequential processes drove data analysis. Listening to the interview recording several times; transcribing each interview verbatim; reading transcripts several times; listening to recordings and reading along with each transcript; making several copies of each transcript; and taking one copy of each transcript to the relevant participant for reviewing. To engage open, in-vivo and inductive coding, I read each transcript many times over; wrote in-vivo codes in the right column, value codes in the left column, and underlined codes; bracketed with pencil emerging patterns on one transcript copy; thought deeply about each bracket and re-read them; assigned a color to each participant; and omitted participant's names and other identifiers.

On another transcript, I replicated pencil brackets with relevant color; separated colored brackets from transcripts (see Creswell, 2013; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Patton, 2002; Saldana, 2013); sorted brackets or data segments by responses to each research question, and matched colored responses to respective research question. I then created a tabular wall display with color brackets under respective questions; read over wall display several times; compared to penciled brackets; and manipulated the data. Thus, gradually, I developed a descriptive phrase code or label for each column. I wrote analytical memos of the process, initial insights on colored paper, and affixed to appropriate points on the wall display (see Miles & Huberman, 1994; Patton, 2002; Saldana, 2013).

Through an iterative process, and deep thought, an understanding of commonalities and differences among responses was gleaned, and initial answers to each

research question acquired (see Creswell, 2013; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Patton, 2002; Saldana, 2013). Using other transcript copies, similarities and differences were assigned color markers not used in first analysis, bracketed, cut apart, and another wall display created alongside the first, showing contrasting responses to each research question. Researcher analytical memos were attached to each data segment in this display. Saldana (2013) advised qualitative researchers to use analytical memos to think critically about the process employed and why, to confront and challenge assumptions, and recognize the extent to which actions and decisions shaped the research and what was seen. The author stated that coding and analytical memo writing are concurrent qualitative data analytic processes. Miles and Huberman (1994) purported that memos are conceptual intent, because memos tied data together in recognizable clusters, demonstrating those data as instances of a general concept. The authors reiterated that memos are useful, powerful sense-making tools at researchers' disposal; and cautioned keeping memos separate from data files, keeping memos sortable by captioning according to main concepts, and underlining other concepts therein. Miles and Huberman continued by offering general advice to researchers about memoing in terms of always have writing material or recording device at hand; stopping whatever was at hand to record the memo, in whatever prose or grammar, include all musings, thinking freely, and avoiding self-censor.

As patterns emerged, data that were qualitatively different from other participant's responses were used in contrast, and to broaden the discourse about professionalism in ECCE. Discrepant cases were identified and explored with participants as a means of checking possible researcher bias (see Maxwell, 2013). After

collecting reviewed transcripts from participants, I thanked each for the review, and requested permission to interview each a second time. A second schedule of individual interviews was drawn up with each participant, and an invitation to attend the first focus group meeting given. At home, I read the reviewed transcripts; aggregated and compared each to the colored brackets; and made changes to the wall display in accordance to changes participants made on transcripts. Stepping back, I reviewed the wall display to find out if initial codes needed changing, because of the additional information or if those codes remained appropriate for the data.

The following week, I engaged in second interviews of participants at which questions not asked at the first interview were asked, along with questions participants felt I should have asked but did not, and clarification of responses given at the first interview was sought. Data from the second interview were analyzed replicating the steps taken for first interview data. Codes and patterns were specifically marked as second interview and placed alongside first interview data. Some participants were called upon to provide additional clarification to responses given at the second interview. This informed data analysis and findings. After 4 weeks reviewing and manipulating the data, I created a table that mirrored the wall display, returned to each participant with a copy of this initial data analysis, for member checking and feedback.

Together, participants and I discussed how I created the data segments, wall display, and arrived at the codes. Participants studied the table, shared ideas and made suggestion for changes or additions, which best reflected the information provided. Back at home, I again manipulated and made changes to data segments based on participants'

feedback. Two expert peer-reviewers were brought to the wall display the following week. The reviewers critiqued and provided feedback that facilitated manipulation of the data several times over. I discussed discrepant information with peer-reviewers, to gain a broader understanding of professionalism in ECCE, and to enhance the confirmability of the study. Additionally, data manipulation and memoing occurred during reviewers' visit which enhanced data reliability and validity.

Data from the two interviews and two focus group meetings were subjected to discourse analysis. Codes and patterns were extracted and aligned by placement alongside respective research questions. Data sets were amended, and manipulated many times based on feedback from participants and expert reviewers. Official documents, participants' activity plans, journals, and memos were treated with document analysis, appropriately labeled and added to relevant data sets. Further manipulation, deep thought, reflection, and discussions with experts led to the development of broad themes by collapsing codes and patterns through aggregation. The broad themes arrived at were aligned under the technical, practical, and critical categories that delineated the levels of practitioners' daily practices in classrooms. This provided insight into whether engagement in this research project had facilitated practitioners' thinking critically about classroom practices and work with young children, and indicated practitioners' developing professionalism.

The final phase of data analysis that accounted for validity, triangulation, minimize researcher bias, and ensured accuracy in analysis was the application of NVivo software. NVivo software illuminate other themes and discrepant views that may have

been omitted. The results were compared to other discrepant views and discussed with participants. However, participants thought that NVivo results could change the views expressed and should be omitted from the findings and discussions. According to Creswell (2013), QSR NVivo software analyzes, manages, and shapes qualitative data. It broadened researchers' view of the data providing better insight for data interpretation. Databases and files were securely stored in a single file for quick and easy access. Data could be easily searched, manipulated, and graphically displayed as codes and categories.

Together with the software specialist, I entered data codes, patterns, themes and categories into NVivo along with raw data sets requesting analysis. The software specialist signed an agreement named the Confidentiality agreement – NVivo software specialist (see Appendix K). Several printouts of the findings were obtained and compared to my hand-coded analysis on the wall display. Similarities and differences between researcher and NVivo analysis were used to manipulate the data, adjust initial analytic findings, and to report and discuss with participants and experts. For deeper interpretations of the findings, a second phase of computer analysis was conducted using the study's conceptual framework for multi-layered analysis, comparison of findings, illumination of discrepant views, enhance rigor, content validity, triangulation, and better understanding of the data. This is discussed fully in Chapter 5.

According to Miles and Huberman (1994) researchers should use software beyond word processing to avoid being hampered. The authors cited Tesch's (1989) statement that computer assisted analysis reduced time, cuts out drudgery, resulted in explicit, systematic procedures, ensured refinement and completeness, and allowed flexibility and

revision of analysis. The authors supported this statement with Becker's (1989) testament of the microcomputer being especially useful for case study researchers interested in bidirectional connections and relationships of arguments and events.

Miles and Huberman (1994) and Patton (2002) advised researchers to: One, be specific about the kind of databases and analysis built into the project, and choose a software appropriate to those needs. Two, work at the level of more competent friends. Three, allow time in the study for learning the software. Four, since no one program did everything, choose several programs with specific strengths. Five, stay tuned as software became obsolete quickly. And six, think critically about the needs of the project as it evolved. I did not augment the NVivo software I used with other software, although according to Saldana (2013) for a student's dissertation project with multiple participant interviews and extensive field notes, Computer-Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS) was a vital and indispensable tool. Decisions regarding additional computer software were made based on evolving analysis needs as the study progresses, and expert reviewer's feedback.

Issues of Trustworthiness

The organization of this section includes how I ensured the trustworthiness and credibility of the study. Each subsection addressed specific elements that are appropriate for qualitative research. The section concludes with ethical procedures for the treatment of participants and inherent rights.

Credibility

Data from each participant were explored to create a rich description of the experiences, issues, and perspectives of professionalism. Through these rich descriptions internal validity is increased (see Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Maxwell, 2013; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Patton, 2002), because the full interview was examined not just the key points (see Maxwell, 2013; Stake, 1995). Member checking, also called respondent validation (Creswell, 2013; Maxwell, 2013) and triangulation of the data were used to add validity to interpretations of the data. Miles and Huberman (1994) provided explanations of the process by which participants reviewed initial findings to validate and clarify the data. The study's credibility was enhanced because of participants' response to and input in, interpretation of interviews and focus groups information. Each participant also felt more valued because of being actively included in the research process.

Triangulation occurred through the inclusion of two interviews, and two focus group meetings conducted at separate times and in different places; and the multiple perspectives of participants expressed in the journals, artifacts, document analysis, and researcher notes. The inclusion of multiple data sources enabled confirmation each participant's response in different contexts and at different times. Using multiple ways to collect data, for example: oral, in-person and written, provided participants with a number of ways to share thoughts, feelings, and perspectives. Additionally, I used multi-forms of data analysis inclusive of manual coding, manipulating, collapsing and aggregating of the data, inputting data into NVivo software for comparison and deeper interpretation; all of which made triangulation more rigorous.

Transferability

A defining characteristic of case study is thick, rich descriptions of participants' sayings, feelings, and perspectives (see Merriam, 2009; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2009); iterative, interpretative case analysis expanded upon this through transparency and contextualization (see Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Patton, 2002). I promoted transferability, through exploration and description of discrepant cases that deepen understanding of the data. As discrepant cases arose, the data were explained within the context of individual participant's responses, and in relation to other participants in the study. Contextualization of similar themes within the same interview provided avenues to connect emerging themes (see Saldana, 2013).

Dependability

In addition to triangulation procedures and member checking, all recordings were transcribed verbatim. Detailed records of how and when data were collected was maintained, to allow for transparency and possible duplication of the study. A central, secure, password protected database, with a data audit and trail was created in which data were stored, managed, and coded. This ensured data integrity, and also facilitated triangulation across elements of time, space, people, and data sets. I was the only one with access to the data that was stored in a locked personal filing cabinet, at a secure private location. All data and files will be kept securely locked until 5 years after the research report is approved and published, thus ensuring confidentiality for participants.

Confirmability

Qualitative researchers established confirmability in several ways. Denzin and Lincoln (2005) viewed confirmability similar to objectivity, in that, the outcomes of the

investigation were not the result of researcher's biases but instead, were informed by the context of the research. I assured confirmability by keeping a personal research journal, and bracketing any feelings or biases that emerged, during each phase of data collection and analysis. I reviewed those notes and annotations throughout the process, as new themes emerged. Using an iterative approach to data analysis via reviewing, member checking, peer reviewing, and data manipulation in accordance to feedback received from participants and peer reviewers. Therefore, the results were informed by individual participant's interpretations.

Ethical Procedures

The early childhood fraternity in Trinidad and Tobago is small; each participant's location in the sector is also public knowledge and record. Since the national ECCE programs is under the jurisdiction of the MOE; a Letter of Cooperation was obtained from the MOE giving permission to conduct this study. In addition, an agreement of how and when participants were being recruited based on the proposed plan was attained. One teacher educator from the lone cooperating tertiary institution engaged in educating teachers for the early childhood sector; provided the institution's graduates list from 2004. From that list, I invited persons to participate in the research study; that tertiary institution was thus, purposefully selected. The department head, reviewed the interview and focus group protocols at a first meeting, identified and recommend graduate practitioners from the list, working with 3 to 5-year old children for the past 10 years, whom I should interview.

All participants worked within the sector, in classrooms with children 3 to 5 years old, at different ECCE Centers. Practitioners volunteered to participate in the study. Being a teacher educator at another tertiary institution did not hold any authority over that head of department, but could have been misinterpreted as a position of authority over practitioners working in classrooms. The only decisions made regarding participants were selection of the initial four tertiary institutions. Thereafter, the selection of participants was determined by the department head of the lone cooperating teacher education institution. It was anticipated that I had taught or worked with some of the people recommended at some earlier employment. This agued well for the study, because that prior relation facilitated familiarity; therefore, good relations prevailed. I established and maintained a warm, collegial, and respectful relationship with each participant. If too few participants were initially recruited, I intended to use snowball sampling of the remaining interested persons listed, to identify other sources of rich data. I was central to impacting social change for ECCE practitioners and the sector when the study was completed. I communicated the researcher's role with the MOE, the tertiary institution, and each participant involved in the study.

In addition to obtaining the IRB approval number 08-07-15-0142401 prior to data collection, practitioners were informed of participants' rights, provided with a consent form for optional signing upon agreement to participate, and contact information for the researcher, dissertation chair, and head of the IRB if necessary. Each participant kept a copy of the consent form and contact information of all relevant authorities should a wish to withdraw from the study arose. If participants refused to participate, assurance was

given that declining would not negatively affect any relationship or have negative consequences. I intended to select other names from the second list of interested persons. If that failed, I would have purposively selected other practitioners from government or private ECCE centers not previously sampled.

All data were confidential and stored electronically in an encrypted password protected file; on a password protected external hard drive and accessed through a private laptop computer. A second set of data, in hard copy, was kept in separate, labeled and dated files, in a locked filing cabinet at a private location. I kept the keys to that filing cabinet secure in personal belongings. The typist, and NVivo software specialist, signed confidentiality agreements, and assured that all electronic and hard copy data were returned after interviews, focus group meetings, and analysis. All consent forms and confidentiality agreements are stored for 5 years with the data files in the locked cabinet at a private location. No one else has access to the data. I will mechanically destroy the storage devices and all paper records created during data collection and analysis phases after 5 years. Data will be disseminated through academic publishing agencies, approved researcher presentations, and academic journals.

Summary

Throughout the investigations, the credibility of this qualitative research was established and maintained through rigorous and detailed processes and procedures. To allow other researchers to replicate and build upon this work, the plan was organized to be consistent with and adhere to, best practice in case study approach, including procedures for the selection and treatment of participants. The chapter included a

rationale for the conceptual framework, the benefits to ECCE practitioners and the sector, and the social change anticipated. Finally, because the interpretations and perspectives of practitioners were at the core of this inquiry, the plan for including practitioners' ideas and feedback was at the heart of the study and helped to promote a broader understanding of professionalism in Trinidad and Tobago's ECCE sector. Chapter 4 which follows contain details of: the setting, demographics, data collection, a comprehensive analysis of participant's responses, reviews, feedback, and other contributions; researcher memos and notes, inclusive of the results of the study organized around each research question.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

In this study, I explored early childhood practitioners' views of professionalism, the impact of government mandates for increased professionalism on the work and lives of practitioners, and how those impacts should be addressed. The research approach was a qualitative case study to understand early childhood practitioners' experiences working with 3- to 5-year-old children in Trinidad and Tobago's ECCE sector. This investigation was guided by one central research question and three subquestions:

Central Research Question: What does the term *teacher professionalism*, as defined in government mandates enshrined in the National Standards and Draft Curriculum Guide, mean to early childhood practitioners?

Subquestion 1:

In what ways did early childhood practitioners' definitions of professionalism differ from official definitions?

Subquestion 2:

In the view of practitioners, how did government mandates impact professionalism and the personal lives of early childhood practitioners?

Subquestion 3:

How did early childhood practitioners think those impacts should be addressed?

In this chapter, I describe the data collection process, including the setting of the study, demographics of the participants, data collection, and analysis as well as provide

evidence of trustworthiness. I conclude with the results, addressing each research question and subquestion and presenting themes or patterns that emerged from the study with supporting data from interviews and focus groups. The study consisted of two audio-recorded interviews with each participant, two audio-recorded focus group meetings, journals, and activity plans from the participants to analyze the issues and experiences raised regarding professionalism in the early childhood sector. I used transcriptions from each of the two interviews for member checking. The intent of the two interviews, two focus group meetings, journals, and activity plans was to understand practitioners' work experiences and lives, and how those work experiences impacted professionalism.

The eligibility criteria for this study were established to focus on early childhood practitioners working for at least 10 years in the ECCE sector in Trinidad and Tobago. This group was targeted because of being in early childhood classrooms before and after the ECCE reforms of 2005. Additionally, there was a dearth of literature on early childhood practitioners working with 3- to 5-year-old children during that period. The 10 government ECCE centers that I used as study sites were located in low-income communities in Trinidad and Tobago, making ECCE accessible to young children in low-income families. In Trinidad, those communities were classified as high-risk communities and community "hot spots" due to the high and increasing levels of crime therein. In Tobago, the communities were slightly different in that, although low income, the communities did not have the same high levels of criminal activities as in Trinidad.

The selection process for participants began with an invitation to participate in the study in April 2016. Following participants' voluntary agreement, I conducted two

interviews. The first interviews (see Appendix A) were conducted from April to June 2016 and were followed by the second interviews from June to July 2016 (see Appendix B). The second interview allowed participants to expand and elaborate on information provided during the first interview. I conducted the first focus group according to the protocol (see Appendix C) in mid-July 2016 and used it for member checking, verification of data, and discussion of information gained from both interviews. I transcribed the audiotaped interviews verbatim, which were typed by a paid typist. At the first focus group, participants manipulate interview data under each of the four research questions that guided the direction of interview questions.

Setting

I conducted the study at convenient, safe settings for the participants, such as the participants' work space (after school hours) or a conference room at the University of Trinidad and Tobago, which became an option because some participants did not want to be in certain communities after school hours or in the evenings because of the high crime index. Participants also felt it might not have been safe for a stranger, to work late in those communities. Therefore, the participants chose sites near residents for the interviews. I did not manipulate the environment in any way and each participants decided the location for the interviewed. I met with participants at the selected location, which was quiet, not distracting, and safe. Some participants traveled to the interview site and were offered return transport. Some accepted the offer, but others had made family arrangements to be picked up after the interviews.

At the time of data collection, there were personal conditions in terms of budget cuts (e.g., participants did not receive the gratuity stipulated by law) and changes in personnel (e.g., some teachers were on end of contract leave resulting in centers being understaffed); these conditions could have influenced interpretation of the results of the study. Additionally, participants reported changes in organizational conditions and other disruptive elements that could have also influenced interpretation of the results. For example, practitioners reported: (a) great frustration that standards on teacher/child ratios were not adhered to; (b) being required to perform administrative tasks that were the supervisor's responsibilities; (c) being abused by parents and administrators; (d) two incidents of child abuse and lack of administrative support in reporting and protecting children from abuse; and (e) having to protect children from a gunfight. Those situations are traumatic conditions that significantly impacted the emotional state of reporting participants, and possibly influenced responses to interview and focus group questions.

Demographics

I verified the demographics in this study via the invitation to participate in the study and during the first meeting with participants to ensure that each met all the criteria needed for the study. The demographics used for this study consisted of the following criteria: each participant was at the time of the study working with 3- and 5-year-old children and had been working in that capacity for at least 10 years. I used these criteria to disqualify anyone under the age of 18 to eliminate minors, a vulnerable population. Additionally, I wanted participants who had worked with young children prior to the legislative changes of 2005. All participants lived in Trinidad and Tobago, with eight

being from Trinidad and four from Tobago. The study consisted of participants from the two major ethnicities, of East Indian descent and of African descent, but race was not a delimiting factor in this study.

Of the twelve participants, three were of East Indian descent, five were of African descent, and four were of mixed ethnicities. Eleven participants were female, one was male, and participants ranged in age from 30 to 55 years old. Six of the participants were contract employees with the MOE's Early Childhood Division, and two were employed at privately owned and operated ECCE establishments. However, the four participants from Tobago, although employed with the MOE, were not on contract. Seven participants were married with children, four were single and had no children, and one was a single parent of five children. Participants' years of service in early childhood education ranged from 11 to 28 years. The participants ranged in level of education as follows: 50% earned a bachelor's degree, 25% attained a master's degree, and 25% possessed a first certificate but were engaged in an undergraduate degree program specializing in early childhood. All of the participants earned higher degrees than their parents had. Prior to interviews, each participant chose a color by which to be represented. Table 2. displays participants' profiles and is followed by a brief description of each participant.

Table 2

Participants' Service Profile and Background Information

Participant Color	Age	Job Status	Years In ECCE	Work Setting	Highest Level of Education	Family Status	Location	Higher Degree than Parents
Royal Blue	39	Teacher assistant	19	Gov't ECCE	Bachelor of Education	Single	North Trinidad	Yes
Sky Blue	42	Teacher	23	Gov't ECCE	Bachelor of Education	Married with children	East Trinidad	Yes
Purple	41	Teacher	26	Gov't ECCE	Bachelor of Education pursuing Master of Education	Single with children	South Trinidad	Yes
Green	30	Teacher	11	Gov't ECCE	Master of Education	Single	East Trinidad	Yes
Gold	38	Teacher assistant	19	Gov't ECCE	Bachelor of Education	Married with children	West Trinidad	Yes
Yellow	38	Teacher	19	Private ECCE	Bachelor of Education	Married with child	Central Trinidad	Yes
Black	39	Teacher assistant	12	Gov't ECCE	Certificate pursuing Bachelor's	Married no children	South Trinidad	Yes
Red	42	Teacher	20	Private ECCE	Certificate pursuing Bachelor's	Married with children	Central Trinidad	Yes
Orange	55	Teacher	28	Gov't ECCE	Bachelor of Education	Single	Tobago	Yes
Lilac	33	Teacher	13	Gov't ECCE	Bachelor of Education	Married with child	Tobago	Yes
Brown	48	Teacher	27	Gov't ECCE	Master of Education	Single	Tobago	Yes
Pink	45	Teacher	25	Gov't ECCE	Master of Education	Married with children	Tobago	Yes

Royal Blue works on full-time contract at a government ECCE center and has been there for 19 years. The participant's aunt influenced the decision to get into ECE. This unmarried participant has no children, plans to start a Master's in Education in the new academic year, and is worried about the plight of young children with special needs.

Sky Blue is a full-time contracted employee of the MOE. This married participant has three children, was appointed teacher at the government ECCE center in a low-income community, and has served there for 23 years. Community members view this participant as the best person to administer the community's ECCE program.

Purple is a full-time contract employee of the MOE, who for 5 years had been the only teacher at a government ECCE center in an away-from-home, low-income community. This participant is completing a master's degree, is unmarried with five children, and has served young children and their families for 25 years. A deep concern for young children with special educational needs distinguished this participant.

Green, the youngest participant, is single with no children and has worked in ECCE settings for 11 years. This holder of a master's degree is on full-time contract as teacher at a government ECCE center in a low- to middle-income, but high-risk, community. This participant is becoming increasingly concerned about the plight of young children from low-income homes.

Gold is married with three children and has 19 years' service in the field. This participant is contracted as assistant teacher at a government ECCE center in an away-from-home, low- to middle-income community. The participant performs all the duties of

teacher at the center. Concerns about child abuse make this participant vigilant with young children.

Yellow works at a privately owned, school-board-managed ECCE center. The participant is married with one child, and functions as lead teacher at that government-assisted center. This participant continues to resist official efforts to sign an employment contract with the MOE, and is empathic towards the plight of colleagues on contractual employment therein.

Black is married but with no children and has 21 years of service in ECE. The participant is contracted as assistant teacher at a government ECCE center in an away-from-home, low-income, high-risk community. A deep, affective, child-centered perspective and concerns about the lack of parental involvement in children's early education drives continued service in the sector.

Red is married with three children and was driven to open a school 10 years ago because of an observed need in the home community. This participant manages the center and teaches a small group of children. Red is deeply concerned about young children with special education needs and the lack of appropriate services locally.

Orange is the unmarried, childless veteran of the group, who was attracted to ECCE simply to work with young children. This participant has served young children and their families for 28 years in the home community's ECCE center. The participant is excited about the rebranding of ECCE in Tobago and believes that the specific needs of young children and their families will receive focused attention.

Lilac is a teacher at a government ECCE center with 14 years of service. The participant is married, has one child, and holds a deep commitment to advancing ECCE in Tobago. This participant is a source of information at her center, sharing her experiences with colleagues, and also serves as an unofficial liaison between Trinidad and Tobago.

Brown contacted Lilac and Orange about participating in the study, is unmarried and childless with 27 years' service in ECCE. This participant holds a master's degree. Brown embraced the opportunity to engage in research in ECE from the perspectives of practitioners in Tobago. The participant stated that finally someone was looking into ECCE in Tobago.

Pink was the major link between Trinidad and Tobago, having worked in ECCE on both islands. This married participant has three children and is concerned about the limited training and experience of ECCE teachers in Tobago. The participant believes that an exchange program between Trinidad and Tobago's ECCE sectors will facilitate invaluable on-the-job training and experiences for peers in Tobago.

Data Collection

The first face to face interviews were audiotaped and scheduled during a 2-month period in April to June 2016 in Trinidad, and during the month of June 2016 in Tobago. The first focus groups were separate, and held in Tobago in early July 2016, followed one week later in Trinidad; then the second focus group was combined with Trinidad and Tobago participants meeting for the first time in Tobago, in August 2016. Before each interview commenced practitioners were reminded of participants' rights to withdraw

from the study at any time; to refuse to answer any question(s) which raised uncomfortable feelings without any negative consequence or any change in researcher/participant relationship; that interviews were audiotaped; and I wrote field notes during the interviews. Each participant was invited to select a color by which to be represented before the study began, thus no names were used, participants' identities were protected, and confidentiality and anonymity were assured.

Participants were informed that the study entailed engagement in two, face to face interviews; two focus groups, journal writing, and providing four activity plans. Participants also understood that member checking of interview information would be facilitated via personal hand delivery and e-mail. Obtaining information from 12 participants across Trinidad and Tobago was a huge undertaking that required being flexible to elicit cooperation from the participants. To this end, I travelled to Tobago six times, five of which was to meet with participants when available because most had previously planned family overseas vacations. Everything worked out in the end; voluminous data were collected according to the approved data collection plan. Data analysis occurred in tandem with data collection and is described in the following section.

This investigation used case study inquiries through two interviews of 12 ECCE practitioners; two focus groups with 10 practitioners; journals from 10 practitioners; four activity plans from 10 practitioners, and three official documents. Through the data, I obtained insight into the work life experiences of early childhood practitioners who had experienced government mandates handed down in the ECCE sector in Trinidad and Tobago, and the impact those had on the personal and professional lives of practitioners. I

sent invitations to participate in the study via e-mail and local post to graduates identified on one institution's graduate student database.

I met each respondent to verify adherence with all the criteria listed in the invitation. Each participant was asked to read and sign the consent form and to use that opportunity to ask any questions. Each also selected the location, date, and time for the interviews to ensure confidentiality and proximity to home bases. At the start of the first audio recorded interview, the participant was invited to select a colored sharpie marker which would represent individual's data from that point onwards. This de-identify and automatize the data. After the first interview, I invited each participant to read the transcribed notes and to suggest changes that best reflected the information shared. I conducted the second 1-hour long interviews three weeks later, using the protocol (see Appendix B) as a guide. Through the second interviews, I gained a deeper understanding of the first interview data. Questions on that protocol probed further into responses that required deeper explanation or to provide additional information. Participants were informed that each would be contacted for verification of data transcribed from the two interviews.

After transcribing the two interviews verbatim, I allowed each participant to review both transcripts, and the research questions used to organize the information obtained from the interviews. Each participant verified the information and provided any other information that may have been missed during the interviews. At the second interview, the participants advised on action I should take if the data revealed incidents of child abuse not reported by front line persons. However, participants concerned with

those issues, agreed to report the two cases of child abuse to the relevant authorities. Additionally, practitioners decided that discrepant cases should be illuminated in the report, if only to demonstrate participants' solidarity with and respect for each other's views and experiences.

Relative to the voluminous data collected, one would have expected a yield of many more themes or patterns, but initial coding only yielded 48 subthemes or patterns. Participants in Trinidad shared similar stories and experiences, as did those in Tobago. However, there were few similarities between ECCE sectors in Trinidad and Tobago, but many very significant differences. Participants described a disconnect between official definitions of quality in ECCE, and what was supported in the national program across and within Trinidad and Tobago; to the detriment of the 'quality' ECCE espoused in official documents, and vociferously articulated by government officials.

Three official documents guided early childhood care and education practices and service delivery in Trinidad and Tobago: The National Standards for Regulating the Provision of Early Childhood Services (2005b), The Draft National Curriculum Guide (2006), and The School Code of Conduct (2009). I read each document many times over and specific instructions, expectations of practitioners were identified, typed, and placed under respective documents on the wall matrix. There was no precise definition of teacher professionalism in any of the three documents. However, I identified limited descriptions of professional practice, behavior, attire, a career lattice, and general job specifications.

Another case study data collection procedure employed was the focus group. I conducted two focus groups in separate phases in both Trinidad and Tobago. At the first focus group on both islands; the participants seven from Trinidad and four in Tobago, a total of 11 participants; met each other for the first time and expressed pleasure that those colleagues were participating in the study. One participant from Trinidad was absent after being hospitalized following a vehicular accident. I presented participants with the wall matrix of the interview data under each research question, and the official documents: The National Standards Document, the Draft National Curriculum Guide, and the National School Code of Conduct, to review. The participants were encouraged to manipulate the data, changing its placement to best represent shared experiences and views. Participants were also allowed to write and add more information to the data anywhere they thought it was needed.

At the first focus group in both Trinidad and Tobago, participants discovered that no response had been given for research question 2: How do practitioners' definitions of professionalism differ from official definitions? I did not ask that question because participants articulated that official documents were deficient in providing a definition of professionalism or any idea of what professionalism ought to be in Trinidad and Tobago's ECCE context. A lively discussion ensued which I guided by asking each participant to consider the expectations of ECCE practitioners outlined in official documents and write their perceptions of how officials viewed teacher professionalism in ECCE. The second focus group meeting occurred on the morning of Tuesday 23rd

August 2016, before the de-briefing event. I paid for the cost of travel to Tobago for seven participants from Trinidad, including that of the typist.

Seven participants from Trinidad and four participants from Tobago provided four activity plans, one for each of the 4-weeks after the first interview. One participant from Trinidad, was unable to continue participating in this research project because she was hospitalized after an unrelated automobile accident. This data source is related to teacher professionalism in that the National Standards (2005b) require early childhood practitioners to plan developmentally appropriate daily activities for small and large groups of children attending their centers. The School Code of Conduct, on the other hand, outlined teachers planning and delivering lessons to pupils according to the school syllabus as professional practice. Activity plans evidence practitioners' work and interactions with children and are used by curriculum officers from the MOE and administrators to determine practitioners' performance and professionalism. Activity plans are the professional tools of practitioners (Brock, 2012; Hordens, 2014, 2016).

Since, having daily activity plans is one of the descriptors of professionalism stated in the National Standard document, activity plans therefore are an important data source for this study. I reviewed each activity plan noting and comparing through document analysis: learning outcomes, contents, instructional strategies, assessment methods, questioning, resources, engagement of children, and teacher interaction. These are the major components of an activity plan outlined in the National ECCE Curriculum Guide (2006). Early childhood practitioners are required to create and use an activity plan

template with those components for each activity. I highlighted similarities and underlined differences in each activity plan.

Generally, practitioners' activity plans aligned to most of the planning criteria in the national curriculum guide, in terms of having planned developmentally appropriate activities for meaningful, experiential engagement of children in their care, but I noted some key differences. For example, all participants did not consistently, intentionally plan for the development of dispositions; the learning outcomes did not list that learning domain which is specifically stated in the National Curriculum Guide (2006) as follows: "Learning outcomes should cover four domains – knowledge, skills, feelings and dispositions" (p. 21). However, all activity plans catered to three domains of learning: knowledge or cognition, skills or psychomotor, and feelings or attitudes. Practitioners at government ECCE centers included development of the following dispositions in activity plans: persistence at tasks; pride in their work; asking for help when needed; expressing thoughts and ideas in complete sentences; collaborating with peers; listening attentively to stories, instructions, and peers; and assisting peers to complete tasks; derived from examples of dispositions stated in the National Curriculum Guide (2006).

Additionally, teaching strategies directly specified in the National Curriculum Guide were not easily discerned by readers, and some activities did not relate to children's lived experiences. This however, related to practitioners in the private sector because those in the public sector did so more consistently. Albeit that in a few instances the contents of activity plans written by practitioners in public ECCE centers did not always reflect children's lived experiences. Activity plans in the private sector did not

include this feature. I presented data from the activity plans for participants' review at the second focus group, to provide opportunity for member checking. There was unanimous agreement with the findings on activity plan.

At the end of each first interview, all 12 participants were given a journal, a pen and journaling instructions – see Appendix E. The participants responded to prompts at specific points in the process by writing for 10 minutes only, as stated in the journaling instructions. I also instructed participants to write any other information not yet provided. The participants returned those journals at the end of the second focus group. One participant who was hospitalized after the first interview withdrew from the study and did not submit a journal. I mined data from the 11 journals by reading each entry several times over, underlining similar key thoughts and circling differing thoughts in responses to prompts about the research process.

Data Analysis

First Interviews Data

Each participant received a transcript of the first interview for member checking. This occurred in tandem with reading copies of each transcript several times over. I underlined common words, phrases and patterns therein, thus creating inductive and in vivo codes, and made notes in the left-hand margin (see Saldana, 2013). I did not engage precoding, rather I opted to code data after collection when I had an idea of how it nested in its context and was able to determine its many varieties (see Miles & Huberman, 1994). I prepared and organized the data through text data in the transcripts; I subsequently reduced the data into themes by coding and condensing codes that I

represented in tables (see Creswell, 2013). According to Patton (2002) and Saldana (2013) qualitative data are made up of verbal descriptions requiring analysis for themes and patterns. I therefore described and evidenced sthemes and patterns with data segments from each of the interview transcripts. A color-coded table was typed for inductive and in-vivo codes, see Table 3 which follows:

Table 3

Inductive and In-Vivo Codes Emerging From Participants' Responses

Research questions	Participants' interpretation of government mandates relating to professionalism
1) What does the term <i>teacher professionalism</i> as defined in government mandates enshrined in the National Standards and Draft Curriculum Guide mean to early childhood practitioners?	<p><i>In-vivo Codes:</i> professional attire and appearance, deportment, certified, trained, higher education, strong knowledge base, professional speech, effective communication, positive interaction, punctuality, flexibility, regularity, commitment, dedication, passion for the job and for young children's development, honesty, enthusiasm, workshops attendance, nurturance, warmth, work with parents, loyalty, respectfulness.</p> <p><i>Inductive Codes:</i> advocacy, empathy, application of good judgment, engagement in best practices, investment in children, team-player, team-spiritedness, collaboration, cooperation, child-centeredness.</p>
2) In what ways did early childhood practitioners' definitions of professionalism differ from official definitions?	<p>Practitioners: <i>In-vivo Codes:</i> A relational core, care of children, emotional investment, love for children, socialization of and with children, social/emotional focus, individualization, nurturance, warmth, child-centered, flexibility, process-orientation on development and learning, subjective, optimization of each child's development and learning, qualitative.</p> <p><i>Inductive Codes:</i> an epic of care, labor of love, innately driven, emotional investment, best practices.</p> <p><i>Officials: In-vivo Codes:</i> obedience, orientation, judgmental, driven by academic achievements, objective, whole group focus, age-based, end product, quantitative, achievement, accountability.</p> <p><i>Inductive Codes:</i> technocracy orientation, market view, returns on investment, commercialism, externally driven, dispassionate/clinical.</p>

Table 3

Inductive and In-Vivo Codes Emerging From Participants' Responses (continued)

Research questions	Participants' interpretation of government mandates relating to professionalism
3) In the view of practitioners, how did government mandates impact professionalism and the personal lives of early childhood practitioners?	<p>Lots of Negative Impacts: <i>In-vivo Codes</i>: Breach of Standards, obedience to new mandates, fast paced and changing mandates, teachers doing administrators' work, overworked practitioners, increase intake of children no staff increase, overcrowded classrooms, increased teacher/child ratios, unprofessional interactions, denied engagement in best practices, unrealistic demands, developmentally inappropriate curriculum expectations, inclusion without support or intervention, discontinuance of professional development, payment stipulated by law not received.</p> <p><i>Inductive Codes</i>: Oppressive work conditions, unethical behavior, weak knowledgebase, harsh treatment of teachers, teachers have no resources, are voiceless.</p> <p>Positives/Benefits: <i>In-vivo Codes</i>: Higher education, free tuition - GATE, personal development, better skilled, more knowledgeable, more confident, more outspoken, better buildings and facilities.</p>
4) How did early childhood practitioners think those impacts should be addressed?	<p><i>In-vivo Codes</i>: More investment in ECCE; definition of professionalism in ECCE as caring, relationship-based; provision of developmental benchmarks; revision of official documents with reflection of practitioners' voices; engagement practitioners in on-going dialogue; cyclical monitoring of program; continuous mentorship for new teachers; staff exchange programs between Trinidad and Tobago; payment of outstanding gratuity; lower teacher/child ratios; provision of continuous needs-based professional development, intervention and support for children with special education needs; on-going stakeholder evaluation of administrators and Centers, allowance of parent involvement.</p> <p><i>Inductive Codes</i>: Reinstatement of screening personnel for suitability for employment in ECCE, establishment of sustainable community involvement/networking, engagement of practitioners in on-going research in ECCE, and utilization of data to inform policy and practice.</p>

Those hand codes or theme words eventually became the nodes for NVivo. On another copy of each interview transcript those data segments were color bracketed, cut apart, and placed under respective research questions and official documents to construct a wall data matrix (see Miles & Huberman, 1994; Patton, 2002; Creswell, 2013). The wall display, which consisted of both in-vivo and inductive codes facilitated continued examination for commonalities of recurring words or themes throughout participants' interviews. I bracketed words and phrases that reoccurred in each interview transcript, similar words were clustered or combined thus creating a description phrase that later became a theme.

I treated information gathered during second interviews similarly. The data matrix was made up of long strips of paper separately headed with one research question; each official document; journals; and activity plans on which was stuck relevant data segments of participants' responses and expressions mined from each data source. The matrix wrapped around the living and dining room walls of my home in kaleidoscopic array. It presented a visual data display that facilitated many manipulations of data segments during analysis (see Miles & Huberman, 1994; Patton, 2002; Creswell, 2013; Saldana, 2013). I was able to step away from the data and easily, conveniently review, manipulate and aggregate it, to develop a better understanding of participants' experiences. I was able to observe the most common and least common themes and repeated words. The word "professional" reoccurred several times in all interviews.

All participants used that word when responding to research question one. The words and phrases: "the way they dress" was used by 10 participants; "how they comport

themselves” and “how they speak to others” was used by nine participants in response to research question one. The question that surfaced was: How do I transport this wall matrix to participants, especially those in Tobago for focus group meetings? I needed to be creative, thus decided to separate columns of the matrix roll and protect each in black garbage bags for safe transport, then reconstruct the matrix at each focus group venue.

Focus Groups Data Analysis

At the Tobago Campus of the University of Trinidad and Tobago, participants reviewed information from the two interviews under each research questions, official documents, and activity plans; then given copies of data segments to place under themes identified in the data. This action engaged participants in the coding of data, and also served to verify manual coding. During that process, I was asked by participants to write other codes for the data segments.

For example, I aggregated issues of child abuse, practitioner/parent interactions, and administrator/parent interactions into one theme unethical conduct, but participants separated child abuse to stand alone. Issues of inappropriate curriculum that had been aggregated under Management Issues; were separated by participants to curriculum guide as another stand-alone theme. Participants asked for two other themes, named practitioners’ work habits and parent involvement, to separate relevant data from management issues where I had aggregated them. Simultaneously, participants reviewed each other’s data, discussed, and shared ideas about the best placement of data segments. I received journals from participants. I read the journals the next day, coded the information and e-mailed to participants for review and feedback. Thereafter, I created a

chart of those data segments and affixed it to the data wall matrix. I transported the participants to another venue for the de-briefing lunch.

Description of Emergent Subthemes and Themes

Initial coding and condensing of similar and overlapping codes resulted in 26 themes, which participants had extended to 30 themes at the second focus group meeting. Through continued manipulation, expert peer reviews, and several levels of analysis I aggregated the 30 themes into seven broad descriptive themes that formed nodes for NVivo and are described in the following section. Participants' exact wording from the interviews, focus groups, and journals relating to each node is discussed under each research question in the Results section.

Theme One.

No Definition of Professionalism, but limited descriptions were provided in official documents. Based on research questions 1 and 2, using the second interview transcript and focus group meetings, participants discovered that the three official documents did not contain a complete definition of professionalism in early childhood; but limited descriptions of professionalism were provided. Participants emphasized that official communications relating to professionalism emphasized obedience to mandates. There is a wide gap between officials' limited views of professionalism and practitioners' much broader views of what professionalism in ECCE should be. Practitioners believe officials should dialogue with them about what it means to be an ECCE practitioner, what the job entails, the roles and functions performed daily; so that through collaborative dialogue a realistic definition of professionalism in ECCE would be derived. The one

subtheme that aligned to create this theme is diverse views of professionalism held by practitioners. Practitioners felt very strongly that the lack of a definition of professionalism contributed largely to the diverse views and dearth of professionalism extant in the sector.

Theme Two.

Practitioners' Perceptions of Officials views of Professionalism. This theme was derived from participants' attempts to respond to research question two. The practitioners' perceptions of officials' views of professionalism in the absence of a definition are: One, obedience oriented in that practitioners must comply with all mandates and demands. The participants quoted the past minister of education's comment on national television when he said, "if ECCE teachers are professionals, they will do what is required of them". Two, although government was preparing documents to reform the national ECCE program, a developmental, visionary lens was not used. Three, officials simply wanted to have tight control of early childhood practitioners' work; based upon a technician, performance view of professionalism. And four, officials do not value early childhood practitioners and do not think they could contribute to defining professionalism in the work contexts.

Theme Three.

Diverse views of professionalism held by practitioners. This theme is an offshoot of theme two and emerged from participants' responses to research question two attained at interviews, focus group meetings and through journals. The participants emphatically expressed views of professionalism in ECCE. Some spoke to the emotional, relational

core of the work, of working with young children as a labor of love and deep investment in the well-being and holistic developing of all young children. Others view professionalism as having a professional outlook, attire, and general appearance; of being: well spoken, grounded in knowledge of the discipline, highly trained and certified, planning and implementing developmentally appropriate curricula, and establishing and maintaining positive relationships with families and communities. A few mentioned dedication to the job and commitment to doing one's best for young children, being punctual and regular on the job, nurturing and warm, and honesty and integrity in all aspects of the job. All of those qualities and characteristics are viewed by participants as key aspects of professionalism they considered crucial for working in early childhood care and education.

Theme Four.

Negative Impacts. Derived from research question three, from both interviews and focus group meetings. The participants spoke at great length of many negative impacts of government mandates on professionalism. I used this theme to identify and collate all evidence of how government mandates negatively impacted participants' professional lives or resulted in negative work experiences. This theme comprised of subthemes that affected participants' professionalism negatively such as recognition and treatment of practitioners, teacher/child ratios, cluster administration, overworked practitioners, overcrowded classrooms, lack of provisions/resources, no dialogue, discontinued professional development, and non-payment of remuneration stipulated by law.

Theme Five.

Positive Impacts. This theme also derived from research question three, using data from interview transcripts and focus groups. Participants spoke of government mandates that resulted in positive impacts on professionalism, such as being able to access higher education through the GATE program, higher remuneration, and job promotion. Personal impacts identified were becoming brave, no longer feeling shy, having the ability to speak in public, being in a better position to help families, and feeling personal satisfaction and self-esteem. Participants felt that the improved personal qualities mentioned above increased their professionalism.

Theme Six.

Similarities and Differences between Trinidad and Tobago: Although no surprise, this theme was one of three that stood alone. Derived from research question three, using data from interview transcripts and focus group meetings, participants in Tobago unanimously reported that very few similarities existed between ECCE in Tobago and ECCE in Trinidad. The participants questioned that discriminatory trend believed to be embedded in the historical, political, and societal contexts of the twin island republic. Practitioners expressed optimism that this study would at least result in a standard definition of professionalism that would lay the foundation for standardization of provisions and services on both islands; thus enhancing program quality and practitioner professionalism. A converse off shoot of theme five, participants vociferously expressed wide disparities between services, provisions, work contexts, remunerations, support, and development between ECCE sectors on each island. For example, in Trinidad, an ECCE teacher's salary ranges from TT\$7,000.00 to TT\$9,000.00 monthly, where as in Tobago,

an ECCE teacher's salary is TT\$6,000.00 monthly. Practitioners in Tobago are very distressed by this disparity given that across both islands, ECCE practitioners received degrees in ECCE at the same tertiary institution and had the same quality or level of successful completion.

Theme Seven.

Addressing Impacts of Mandates: This developed from responses to research question four in which practitioners expressed needs for continuous professional development and other support to enhance and improve professionalism. For example, the Standards state:

The principal is responsible for standards of daily care and education in the setting. The principal should also encourage and support the education and training of other staff members; and also ensure that appropriate opportunities are available to all; and the principal must be concerned with providing a high-quality service, and must therefore, demonstrate at the meeting with ECCE officials the effective development of staff. (Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, 2005, p. 8)

Consequently, practitioners were mandated to attend professional development workshops hosted by the ECCE Division at the end of each academic term. At the time of data collection participants reported the discontinuation of professional development workshops. ECCE center management issues that hindered professionalism inclusive of practitioners' work habits; and issues of wide variety regarding the implementation of government mandates. I aggregated those three codes to create theme seven.

Discrepant Cases

Organizing, classifying, categorizing, searching for patterns, and synthesizing are processes embedded in qualitative data analysis. The literature did not provide guidelines regarding the amount of data or levels of analysis required to evidence the conclusions I drew. Throughout data analysis, I constantly compared and contrasted findings to illuminate emergent, discrepant or unique qualities from the data. Two discrepant cases emerged from interviews, focus groups, and journals: that of safety and security, and child abuse that were reported separately by participants. The issue of safety and security was highlighted by 1 participant, who was incensed that the old ECCE center, to date has no security guard. Unlike ECCE colleagues, this particular early educator has the additional responsibility to daily perform the duties of security guard, protect children and staff when gun shots shattered the calm morning, and dissuade visitors who do not adhere to the posted 'dress code' for entering the premises. Yet, the ECCE Division had not intervened or addressed the crucial need of a security guard at that ECCE center. I asked what kept the high commitment displayed, the practitioner replied:

When I observe the children's reactions upon seeing me there to receive them every day, how they break free of their parents' grasps and run into my open arms, it's very heart-warming and rewarding. I know I am doing something right, and that without my commitment, these children will be abandoned to whatever happens in their community. (Black)

Another participant spoke emotionally about the troubling issues of child abuse. The participant reported having two cases that still resonate. That practitioner was still worried about those children although they had left ECCE for primary school, and

wondered who would look out for them there? Will they trust another teacher to help them? She recalled:

The child came to school that day and I thought she looked alright, but somehow during the morning I looked at her and was taken aback by her facial expression – it was dreamy, far away, afraid, and with flooded eyes – I still cannot forget that look. (Green)

According to the participant, that child was an active participant in the program, but that morning she did not participate in her usual, favorite activities, was very tearful, and looked frightened. Teachers had a brief conference and decided to observe and record her behavior throughout the day:

Our observations were very troubling. She did not eat breakfast, fruit or lunch, had two toileting accidents, resisted being attended to, and did not engage any activities. Even when teachers brought her to a group she walked slowly, did not interact or answer questions. (Green)

Whilst the child slept, teachers called the administrator to share their concerns, the administrator asked them to say nothing until she came to the center the next day. Upon arrival the following morning, the administrator read the observation notes and asked about the child who was absent that day. The participant was asked to call the home to inquiry about the child's absence. The mother said it was her birthday, so the child was at home to celebrate with the family, and assured that the child was not ill. The administrator then instructed – warned - to say nothing about the observations, not to make trouble for administration and the center because too much paper work would be required. After the interview, I gave the practitioner information regarding the Children's

Hotline and the Children's Authority. At the second interview, I was informed by the participant, that the required information had be given to the authorities. The participant agreed to be contacted and to cooperate with the authorities.

The participant talked angrily about the physical abuse of a little boy:

Everyone at the center saw the marks and bruises on his body. He was light skinned, so bruises showed up easily, when asked he reported either his mother or an uncle hit him. One day he came to school with a huge bump on his head and complained of a headache; when asked what happened to his head, he said, "uncle ... jam me on the wall. (Green)

The mother was called and visited the center that afternoon. The participant with the lead teacher held a meeting with the mother in the office. The mother's story was that the boy was prone to accidents, something was always happening to him. The boy had been at the center for two terms and had not had any accident there. Physically, he was very agile, had good balance and co-ordination for his age, so his mother's explanations were confusing. The practitioners requested the mother take him to a doctor for the bump on the head, gave her literature about head injuries, and the meeting ended cordially. A detailed report was placed on his file and the administrator was informed.

The boy was absent for 3 days, but returned the following week looking better, and as agile as ever. However, towards the end of the term he complained about abdominal pain:

The lead teacher and I took him to the washroom area and lifted his shirt. We took pictures of the array of bruises but did not question the child. We placed him on a cot;

and I called the Children's hotline to make an anonymous report. The authorities said they would handle the case so that the center was not implicated. We witnessed the fallout but took little comfort in it because the physical abuse of one child is one too many. The authorities visited the home, spoke with the mother and uncles named by the child. They also spoke with neighbors who we were told corroborated the child's stories of brutal beatings; saying they had intervened to stop those beatings and were tired of asking the mother to stop. The child now lives with his maternal grandmother who had since thanked the staff for helping her grandson. (Green)

Expert Peer Review

After the seven themes were established, I created another wall matrix showing the original 48 patterns or subthemes and their aggregation into 7 themes. I printed four individual copies of same and invited three local expert peer reviewers to manipulate and critique the wall matrices. During the 1-hour peer review session, I took copious notes of comments, suggestions, and body language. I also wrote thoughts on what was transpiring. Feedback from expert peer reviewers fueled continued analysis via data manipulation.

NVivo Coding

The hand coding system I employed and expert peer review resulted in partial findings, but I wanted to ensure the validity and reliability of those efforts, thus used NVivo software to check those partial findings for accuracy. NVivo not only enabled analysis of qualitative data by disassembling it, checking and rechecking the coded material, but by reassembling it to display the effectiveness and efficiency of data

collected from all data sources, and created tables and figures from the data (see Yin, 2016). For this analytic aspect, I employed an expert NVivo user, provided all the codes, matrices and data for input. The output was used for comparison with hand coded results and expert peer review findings. The expert user employed several NVivo applications to correlate and create tables of recurring themes and words. The last step in data analysis was to compare NVivo results with hand coded, participants' and expert peers' reviewed results. NVivo offered two other discrepant cases – that of ECCE centre having no security guard, and teacher being threatened by disgruntled parent. The participants and expert peer reviewers agreed that since I would mention those issues in the report, the discrepant cases should focus on issues of child abuse. This is discussed in the Results section of this chapter. Additionally, I overlaid both sets of results with aspects of the theories of Fullan (2007) and Senge (1994) that were relevant to themes therein; this also is discussed in Chapter 5.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Credibility

To ensure credibility, I engaged participants in member checking and a qualified stenographer to review interview audio recordings and transcripts for accuracy, clarity, and to include information not necessarily pertinent to the study or incorrectly expressed parts of responses. Via e-mail, participants removed or added information from transcripts of both interviews. Participants were pleased about the opportunity to elucidate statements previously provided. Given a choice between having second interviews by telephone or face to face, and transcript review via e-mail, the participants

unanimously chose to meet face to face, and review transcripts via e-mail. The participants needed little reminder to review transcripts, but needed encouragement to complete the journals. I accounted for data triangulation through different protocols for the first and second interviews, and asked participants the same questions. I collected interview data on different days, at different times, in different locations, and from different practitioners. Although I sampled a stratified range of practitioners from different parts of Trinidad and Tobago, all participants met the study's criteria.

The early childhood sector in Trinidad and Tobago is small. Practitioners are acquainted with each other, especially those serving in government settings. I, therefore, was acquainted with several of the participants from prior employment as teacher trainer. To reduce bias, I bracketed feelings and thoughts, confined those to a journal, and used the exact words expressed by each participant in data segments under each research question and theme. Hand coding, expert review, and NVivo software added comparison and afforded contrast thereby accounting for validity of information. Because NVivo identified only themes uploaded to the program, it was critical to conduct hand-coding first; to understand early childhood practitioners' work experiences. I looked over the journal and reflected on the stories about the impact of government mandates on practitioners' professionalism in ECCE (see Patton, 2002).

Transferability

Procedures for data collection were discussed in the Data Collection section of this chapter. In that process, it was simple to follow the steps required to complete data collection. I mailed invitations to participate in the study to the residential addresses of 29

participants in addition to a similar e-mail being sent to each. On a first come first contact basis, I initiated telephone calls requesting a meeting. I also kept a list of all respondents, in case too few persons were willing to participate in the study after our first meeting, at which I checked eligibility criteria before conducting interviews. In-depth information about each participant provided at the beginning of this chapter gave contextual completeness inclusive of participant selection, description of the context, information about each participant, and description of data collection methods. At our second meeting, informed consent was signed and the first interview protocol used. I provided adequate description of the steps employed to analyze and interpret the information gathered, in the section titled Data Analysis, so that readers could assess and evaluate data transferability to other contexts (see Miles & Huberman, 1994; Yin, 2016).

Dependability

In keeping with the traditions of qualitative research, dependability in terms of the stability or consistency of the process of inquiry utilized over time was ensured. To assure dependability in this qualitative study, expert peer reviewers looked over the transcripts checking for mistakes in the study's conceptualization, data collection, interpretation of findings, and reporting the results. I presented the sampling logic, interviews, focus groups, journals, and activity plans for vetting. This ensured consistency in the research process, thus provided validity in the results to replicate the study. Additionally, I used an expert research reviewer to assist in development and approval of interview questions (see Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Using the expert research reviewer and expert peer review allowed for assessing dependability to judge how well

steps in the study met the credibility and transferability standards discussed in Chapter 3. This was done to ensure that I maintained dependability, so as not to diminish the trustworthiness of the study.

I, therefore, cross-examined sources, checking for consistency amongst participants over time and comparing perspectives from different angles or points of view. Throughout the 23 interviews, it was noted that the views of decision makers were included. I conducted interviews at locations selected by participants and under natural conditions, thus the participants were not manipulated through random assignment. Each practitioner was treated ethically and informed of the rights of a research participant. The participants were encouraged to react to the transcribed data, make any change that best expressed thoughts and feelings, and also to express other thoughts in the journals. Those changes were taken seriously and included in data segments for analysis (see Saldana, 2013).

Confirmability

As a strategy, confirmability avoided bias and ensured neutrality. This was important for, although Patton (2002) acknowledged that objectivity was achieved in science through the use of instruments that did not rely on human skill and perception; Patton, however, recognized how difficult real objectivity was to ensure because the tests and questionnaires were designed by humans; thus, intrusion of researcher bias was unavoidable. Confirmability represented efforts to assure the objectivity of the research and participants. I ensured that all data were segments of participants' experiences and feelings. I took precaution to bracket and omit personal feelings, ideas, beliefs,

preferences, and/or characteristics. I would be remiss not to emphasize the use of triangulation to advance confirmability, which also prevented biases from surfacing. I aligned the results to and referenced the literature inclusive of research findings which confirmed interpretations and strengthened the study's confirmability. This was discussed in the results section of this chapter and in further depth in Chapter 5.

Results

The four research questions were answered through coded data segments and emergent themes from interview transcripts, focus group meeting, official documents, activity plans, and journals. I applied the seven emergent themes from the data to the corresponding research question. In the following section, I discuss the findings in relation to each research question. Through hand coding and NVivo analysis, themes emerged from topic clusters. Similar responses from participants to interview questions formed the basis for each theme. As previously stated in Data Analysis, I created a wall matrix with each research question, re-read each interview transcript, underlined frequently used words and phrases which I coded in the left-hand margin, and at another reading I circled phrases related to professionalism in responses and coded these in the right-hand margin. I kept an informal tally of how often a word was used by placing the participant's color and the tally alongside. When themes were established, I revisited the data and listed sub-themes under each to identify its important features. Each participant's experiences emerged through the transcripts, focus group discussions, and journals. This illuminated the phenomenon under study and provided new, deeper insight.

The first interview allowed each participant to share work experiences, the impact of government mandates on professional and personal lives, and thoughts about how those impacts should be addressed. The second interview probed first interview responses and provided deeper understanding and further explanations. All the practitioners were very willing to participate, to speak about troubling situations that hindered professionalism. I allowed the participants freedom to speak without interruption, judgment or contradiction. According to Yin (2016):

Case studies get as close to the subject of interest as they possibly can, ... partly by their access to subjective factors – thoughts, feelings, and desires – the foremost concern of case study research is to generate knowledge of the particular. (Yin, 2016; p. 69)

From the data sources named above 48 codes emerged. Through several manipulations based upon participants' and expert peer reviewers' feedback, these aggregated into seven broad themes seen below in Table 4.

Table 4

Combining Codes – Data Aggregation

Broad themes	Data codes
No precise Definition of professionalism, but limited descriptions provided	National standards, national curriculum guide, national school code of conduct, official documents need review.
Practitioners' perceptions of officials' views. Positive impacts.	Masculine, technocratic view of professionalism, obedience oriented, relational core of ECCE ignored, practitioners' diverse views of professionalism unknown by officials, emotional labor not recognized, professional knowledge and judgement not valued, no autonomy, do as dictated/demanded, adhere with fidelity to government mandates, punitive.
Diverse views of professionalism held by practitioners	Trained, certified, strong knowledge-base, caring, love of children, dedication, loyalty, nurturing, warm, passionate, regularity and punctuality; professional outlook, attire, deportment, and appearance; professional speech and conduct; continuous professional development; effective communicator; parent/community involvement.
Negative impacts	Breach of national standards, breach of employment contracts, overworked practitioners, no dialogue, increased teacher/child ratios, over-crowded classrooms, no provisions/resources, fast paced, changing mandates, poor center management, discontinued professional development, Inappropriate curriculum, oppressive work conditions.
Positive impacts	GATE funded tertiary education, professional and personal development, higher professionalism, higher salary, promotion to teacher/administrator, better skilled.
Similarities and differences between Trinidad and Tobago	Similar education at same institution, both groups are voiceless, nifferent salary scale, No professional development workshops, vacation time, no visits and supervision, representation by TTUTA.
Addressing impacts	On-going dialogue with practitioners, recognition of practitioners, revise official documents to reflect practitioners' voices and research findings, one administrator for each ECCE center, Lower teacher/child ratios, payment of owed gratuity, honor contract terms/conditions, intervention for children with special needs, continuous professional development, engage practitioners in on-going research, public information/sensitization of practitioners' roles/functions.

Table 4, is followed by Table 5, which shows the alignment of aggregated themes with the research questions that underpin discussion of the findings.

Table 5

Aligning Research Questions with Themes

Research questions (RQ#)	Themes from data analysis
RQ1: What does the term <i>teacher professionalism</i> as defined in government mandates enshrined in the National Standards and Draft Curriculum Guide mean to early childhood practitioners?	No precise definition of professionalism, but limited descriptions provided by officials.
RQ 2: In what ways did early childhood practitioners' definitions of professionalism differ from official definitions?	Practitioners' perceptions of official views of professionalism. Diverse views of professionalism held by practitioners.
RQ 3: In the view of practitioners, how did government mandates impact professionalism and the personal lives of early childhood practitioners?	Negative impacts. Positive impacts. Similarities and differences between Trinidad and Tobago ECCE sectors.
RQ 4: How did early childhood practitioners think those impacts can be addressed?	Addressing impacts.

Research Questions and Supporting Themes

After data analysis, the 48 subthemes that were aggregated into seven broad themes emerged from interview transcripts, focus group discussions and journals. Research Question 1 addressed the meaning of the term teacher professionalism as defined in government mandates enshrined in the National Standards and Draft Curriculum Guide to early childhood practitioners. The theme that emerged was: No precise definition of teacher professionalism was provided, but limited descriptions were included. For example, the National Standards document states:

All staff members and anyone who lives or works on the premises used, or who may come into regular contact with the children must get legal clearance to work at an ECCE Center by obtaining a police certificate of good character. All staff at government and government assisted Centers must be registered at the Ministry of Education.

Qualifications – the teacher must be appropriately qualified – have a bachelor’s degree in ECCE or bachelor’s degree in Education with specialization in ECCE, and at least five years’ experience as a teacher. (Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, 2005; p. 4-9).

Research subquestion 2 addressed the ways in which early childhood practitioners’ definitions of professionalism differed from official definitions. The themes that emerged are: (a), practitioners’ perceptions of official views of professionalism as technocratic, which is a market view focused upon academic performance, accountability, and obedience. Participants believe that officials do not know of or understand: the relational core of working with young children and their families; the emotional intensity of the job; the nurturing and care required; and the importance of involving parents and the community; (b) practitioners hold diverse, broader views of professionalism that are relational and care based; a labor of love; developmental; context specific; individualized; and standards oriented inclusive of professional outlook behavior and appearance. Research subquestion 3 addressed practitioners’ views on how government mandates impacted professionalism and their personal lives. The themes that emerged are: (a) many negative impacts in terms of breach of standards, overcrowded Centers, high teacher/child ratios, no dialogue, overworked teachers, no

provisions/resources, discontinued professional development; (b) few positive impacts such as higher certification, higher pay, job promotion, better skilled, and greater personal development.

Research subquestion 4 focused on how practitioners thought those impacts should be addressed. The broad theme ‘addressing impacts’ that emerged, comprised the following subthemes: (a) revise national documents to reflect practitioners’ voices; (b) honor terms of employment contracts and all National Standards; (c) continuous professional development; (d) provide resources; (e) on-going dialogue with practitioners; (f) early intervention for children with special needs; (g) one administrator to each ECCE Center; (h) annual community-based appraisal of ECCE Centers; (i) public sensitization of role of practitioners; and (j) standardize provisions and services across Trinidad and Tobago and at all ECCE Centers.

Central Research Question:

To present the results of responses to the central research question, I first, identify the theme that emerged under that research question. This is followed by a summation of the theme. Each theme is supported by segments from the data.

Theme # 1.

No definition of teacher professionalism, but limited descriptions. Unanimously, participants felt the fact that government mandates did not articulate a precise definition of professionalism. The participants thought this demonstrated officials’ lack of knowledge about early childhood care and education, and what working in that sector entailed. Although limited descriptions of professionalism were provided, these were

insufficient to guide practitioners' development of professionalism. For example, the national Standards document states:

All staff members and anyone who lives or works on the premises used, or who may come into regular contact with the children must get legal clearance to work at an ECCE Center by obtaining a police certificate of good character. All staff at government and government assisted Centers must be registered at the Ministry of Education.

Qualifications – the teacher must be appropriately qualified – have a bachelor's degree in ECCE or bachelor's degree in Education with specialization in ECCE, and at least five years' experience as a teacher. (Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, 2005; p. 4-9). The practitioners viewed this as the root of all workforce troubles in the sector including the collapse of the system.

Gold said:

“The official documents were not written to help or guide practitioners, they were created to protect officials and policy-makers, so they could say we have standards to follow, but where are the standards for professionalism”?

Pink expressed:

“If markers or a definition of professionalism had been articulated in government mandates more practitioners, programs, and centers would provide quality service to our youngest citizens”.

Green said:

The crafters of our official documents did not care sufficiently about us and our development to outline what constitutes professionalism in ECCE. We had no guidance

or terms of reference to guide our practice; where is the quality officials espouse without such guidelines?

Red said:

In Trinidad and Tobago, we are continually plagued by putting the cart before the horse – in the case of ECCE, a Standards document, Curriculum Guide and School Code of Conduct were prepared, but they are deficient in providing markers of professionalism in the sector.

Black said:

The national official documents for ECCE do not define professionalism, the ECCE Division has not outlined markers of professionalism – we have nothing to guide our professionalism. I do not think officials themselves know what professionalism in ECCE means.

Sky Blue said:

“When I read the Standards document, I think it is incomplete, several things are missing from that document, the most important being a definition of professionalism, that should have been clearly stated”.

Brown said:

Tobago never used or implemented things stated in the official documents – professionalism like everything else was left to the discretion of individuals in practice, so there is wide difference in what happens at centers. Who is to judge it as incorrect?

Orange said:

“None of our official documents have a definition of professionalism. There is nothing to guide or motivate us to improve our professionalism. New teachers do not know what professionalism is about”.

Several participants were of the opinion that early childhood practitioners’ contractual employment classification as nonteaching staff who are to teach at ECCE centers, may have been the reason officials had not thought of defining professionalism or articulating markers by which teacher professionalism would be assessed. The participants challenged the legality of such contracts, citing its terminology as the leading cause of wide disparity in levels of professionalism extant in the sector, and views of professionalism held by practitioners.

Gold questioned:

““If we are nonteaching staff, why do we have teaching duties; if we are nonteaching staff should we be judged by the National School Code of Conduct which specifically addresses teachers’ behavior, attire, interactions, and deportment?”

Pink said:

The policy-makers seemed to have been in a hurry to get funding from the World Bank by meeting the criteria of having National Standards and a National Curriculum Guide for ECCE; but they did not think of or even consult with us about how we work, what we do on a daily basis – they do not know the reality of working in ECCE.

Royal Blue said:

The official documents are ten plus years old and in urgent need of review. I hope that when reviewing those documents, the government will speak with us and that our

views on professionalism will be reflected – that’s the only way we can go forward – there must be collaboration between officials, EC practitioners, and other stakeholders.

Purple said:

What bugs me is the clause - and any other duties given by administration – this is the loophole that enables us being overworked and minimizes our professionalism. Duties we are not trained for are now included in our job description, and we are assessed based on performance of those duties.

Participants who worked at privately owned and operated ECCE centers like peers in Tobago did not implement national standards at their centers. In their contexts, it was the responsibility of center owners and managers to do so. Staff at privately owned and operated ECCE centers worked in accordance with their center’s philosophy and curriculum as articulated by management. Thus, although the official documents guiding ECCE in Trinidad and Tobago provided some descriptors of professionalism, the documents lack a comprehensive guide, full descriptors or a precise definition of teacher professionalism. Additionally, official documents only vaguely refer to expectations for practitioners’ performance on the job. Over the years, other duties were verbally imposed on practitioners as extensions of their job description and appeared on annual appraisal. For example;

Royal Blue reported

Suddenly, we were required to keep a daily log of all visitors to our center, detailing the purpose or nature of their visit and how we dealt with the matter. Our work

with the children was frequently interrupted by those visits. We created a schedule of staff assigned to maintain that log.

Gold reported

One day, our administrator visited and called us to a staff meeting, children were left unsupervised, playing with table top games and puzzles. A new mandate from the Ministry was to be implemented immediately – all teachers are now required to accompany each child or groups of children to the toilet. Children were no longer allowed to go to the bathroom on their own. Activities are constantly interrupted to take children to the bathroom.

Purple reported

Our appraisal form now included new criteria like: attention to children's personal needs; maintenance of daily log book; daily reporting of center's program to administrator. This last criterion requires teachers and assistant-teachers to record all that happens with her group of children throughout the school day. Staff purchased a notebook to record that information.

Green reported

One day, I answered a telephone call from our administrator – she was very irate and demanded that I immediately walk through each classroom, unplug and remove the standing fans provided by parents to keep their children and teachers cool. We are now assessed on keeping children safe. Any child incident or accident requires filling out forms in triplicate and regardless of what happened, we the teachers are treated as being negligent.

Research Subquestion 2:

The second research question addressed differences in officials' and practitioners' definitions of professionalism. Two themes emerged in responses to that question. The first theme is practitioners' perceptions of official views of professionalism given the absence of a precise definition of the term professionalism. Participants were invited to share their perceptions of how they thought officials view professionalism. The second theme is practitioners themselves hold diverse views of professionalism, they were invited to share their own definitions of the construct.

Theme # 1.

Practitioners' perceptions of official views of professionalism. Participants felt strongly that officials viewed early childhood teachers as babysitters, nonprofessional workers, they are not recognized as teachers, their emotional labor is not valued, and their knowledge base not appreciated; consequently, officials needed to prescribe how they worked at ECCE centers. All participants expressed that officials view professionalism as being obedient, as strict compliance to fast changing mandates and directives.

Royal Blue said:

ECCE teachers are required to have a degree in ECCE – we have the degree – yet we are not allowed to use our judgement when working with children. Officials tell us what they want done, our professional knowledge is not accepted; we have no autonomy.

Pink said:

In the National Standards we are expected to be at centers half an hour before the start of school at 9: 00 A. M. Yet, on national television the government agreed that we are required to receive children from working parents. No time was stated. I arrive punctually at my center before 8: 30 every morning and meet parents waiting to hand over their children before going to work.

Green said:

“Officials expect us to do exactly as they say without question, even when it is not appropriate for the children we serve – where is the professionalism in that? We have no autonomy”.

Black said:

This issue is very confusing. Officials want us to earn degrees, we earn those degrees; are promoted, yet they continue to ignore our advice, dictate what we do without knowledge of the children and families we serve, and are intolerant of adjustments made to meet the needs of our children.

Sky Blue reported:

To the government, early childhood teachers are just technicians – doing what they are supposed to do. The minister of education said on national television – if those teachers are professionals, they will do what is required of them. So, to him, professionalism is about doing as we are told, being obedient.

Theme # 2.

Diverse views of professionalism held by practitioners. Unanimously, participants expressed that early childhood teachers held many different views about professionalism

and offered different reasons for those views. For example, some participants thought that peers who were not trained in early childhood, lacked that specialized core body of knowledge to guide practice. Others shared the view that some early educators studied early childhood education at certificate level many years ago and think that the pinnacle in ECCE teacher education had been attained. The knowledge base and practices of those teachers are dated, in need of upgrade, and on-going professional development. Those individuals rely on personal experience with preschool and engage in ancient, meaningless rituals. Other participants believe that individual family background would have inculcated within persons some positive human qualities that formed the basis of practice and professionalism. For example,

Royal Blue said:

In my family, we treat people with dignity – we are careful how we speak to people – with respect; therefore, for me, professionalism has a lot to do with how we relate to and treat with the people we serve and our colleagues. It is about investing in the people we serve, being knowledgeable in our discipline, and confident that we can improve outcomes for children.

Lilac said:

We in ECCE have different views of what professionalism is, some see it as how we dress; our deportment and behavior – these are parts of, but not the full picture – I myself am not sure of all aspects of professionalism in ECCE.

Orange said:

“Professionalism deals with how we relate with the children, their parents and our coworkers. It also involves how we dress and comport ourselves in and out of the center”.

Purple said:

Professionalism has so much woven into it. It is about how we work with our clients, our colleagues and superiors; our outlook or world view – regarding what we do and how we do it, and so much more. Professionalism also has a relational base.

Red said:

“That’s such a huge word; many of us including myself do not yet fully understand it. It has to do with knowing our work and doing it well – to the best of our ability”.

Brown said:

Refers to the level of proficiency with which teachers do all aspects of their job. How they present their selves and their interactions with children, parents, and colleagues; including their speech, knowledge, and preparedness for curriculum delivery.

Yellow said:

Professionalism is to know your craft and to perform it very well. Professionalism has many components which I only learnt about in training, so those who are not trained will not know about it. Their view of professionalism is very limited.

Pink said:

Being an ECCE professional means being knowledgeable, a team player, putting children first, having a professional outlook – always doing your best – being regular and punctual, and worrying about the children when you are absent.

Green said:

Early childhood teachers have many different views about professionalism. Some think it is only about being punctual and regular; others about how they dress and behave, yet others about interaction, work practices, and being a team player. I think it is all of that and even more.

Sky Blue said:

To me professionalism in ECCE is about how one dresses, their deportment, behavior in the school and community, their interaction with children, parents and colleagues, and being a resource for the center in terms of researching topics for proper planning and delivery of curriculum.

Black said:

For me professionalism is about being knowledgeable about early childhood and doing your best for the children; relating, interacting warmly, positively with young children. Your training prevents you from doing certain things, you are aware that you need to do things in a particular way, can explain and defend what you do; and are confident in your work.

Participants lamented the behavior of new practitioners – the younger ones – who are believed not to be really committed to working with young children. The participants believe those persons viewed the job simply as employment which provided finances and is better than being unemployed. The participants feared that the behavior of those novices are the leading cause of the poor perceptions of ECCE practitioners held by some sectors of the national community. Participants reported some new entrants are not

passionate about working with young children; are not dedicated or committed to ECCE; abscond from work, call in sick, some do not even call in, are unpunctual, often dressed inappropriately, and became too familiar with some parents.

According to Orange:

When I look at the behavior of young teachers, I do not think they are committed to ECCE. They come to school very late. Their clothes are very tight and short. They are loud on the streets, and do not carry about themselves as teachers.

Black said:

One day, an intern was sticking a poster on the wall so I could conduct a picture reading/sentence constructing activity. The children who were seated on mats on the floor started saying the color of her underclothing. She turned around shouting at them angrily “mind your own business.”

Yellow reported a similar situation:

“We had a teacher who always dressed in very short, tight clothing and usually arrived late even though she drove. The School Board eventually discontinued her employment”.

Sky Blue said:

Some of the younger teachers are a real challenge. Getting them to conform to standards of attire, practice, behavior in and out of the center is difficult. Some become much too familiar with parents, and this sets a bad precedent for other teachers and parents. They do not seem willing to follow our examples.

Green said:

I saw the parent slap her. Everyone was in shock. She got very angry and slapped him back in the presence of children and staff. Her very familiar relationship with that parent - asking him to do favors for her - led to that situation. We had been speaking with her about it, but she ignored us.

Generally, participants felt that colleagues in ECCE, trained and untrained thought of the job as being at school every day, minding the assigned children and having done so, had fulfilled the duties and are professionals. Participants lamented the novices' thoughtlessness in approach to working in ECCE and beliefs in the ancient, meaningless rituals performed with children, to simply pass time at the center. The participants are of the view that despite the fact that socialization occurred daily, little cognitive stimulation and or challenge was provided to those young children; who remained dependent on the teacher to perform simple self-care tasks like dressing and tidying selves and putting away personal belongings. These teachers were not facilitating children in becoming independent. Some teachers actually say, "but you want us to take care of the children; we doing that and you are complaining". This remark, the participants felt, was difficult to tolerate from those who were trained and have certification in ECCE.

Research Subquestion 3.

The third research question addressed how practitioners thought government mandates impacted professionalism in ECCE. Three broad themes emerged from the data: negative impacts, positive impacts, and similarities and differences between Trinidad and Tobago. In the discussion that follows, each theme is supported by data segments.

Theme # 1.

Negative impacts. This theme was the most important in the interviews, focus group meetings, and journals. That theme elaborated on the negative impacts of government mandates on professionalism in ECCE, and that were important to participants' personal and professional lives. Breach of terms of employment contract: One of the negative impacts of government mandates on professionalism in ECCE was contract employment stated as policy in the Standards document; employment within the public ECCE sector operated on a 3-year contractual cycle, at the end of which reemployment depended upon appraisal ratings and recommendations from administrators. A caveat to the contract is that upon completion of each three-year cycle practitioners would be awarded a 10% gratuity. All participants in Trinidad felt that contract employment is the bane of working in ECCE; facilitated extremely difficult working conditions; and is the worst thing that had happened in the sector. The participants challenged the reasons for giving contract employment to teachers, when teaching is a permanent vocation – most people became teachers for life, and historically, traditionally teaching offered permanent employment.

Purple said:

“With the introduction of contracts, the level of professionalism in ECCE dropped significantly. It is seen in how teachers perform their duties, the lack of passion and enthusiasm for the job, and their defeated countenance”.

Green said:

I do not believe contract employment for teaching is right. I am also concerned about the language in the contract, especially the ‘and any other duties given by administration.’ This clause has empowered administration to victimize teachers. They hold the contract over our heads like a sword, threaten us with nonrenewal if we do not do as they demand.

Royal Blue said:

Whoever came up with the idea of contract employment for early childhood teachers, obviously knew nothing about working with young children and their families – the emotional intensity of our labor, the attachments children form with their teachers – and how contract breaks impact those children.

All participants agreed that the timing or duration of contracts are not in sync with the education system. For example, contracts end midterm or at any time, and the teacher must exit the center to proceed on leave. The children are distributed among remaining staff – there is no continuity of care, the children become insecure and afraid. The psychological impact on children, parents, and teachers were not considered. Additionally, consideration was not given to the management issues that arise from teachers being on leave during school times. No replacement or support staff were provided to centers during teachers’ contract breaks and leave.

Participants spoke about anomalies regarding salaries paid to practitioners and the breach in policy regulating the salary scale for practitioners. At the beginning of the national program in 2007, early childhood teachers with a first degree received a monthly salary of TT\$9,000.00, teacher/administrators TT\$12,000.00, and assistant teachers

TT\$5,000.00. In 2016, at the time of data collection, there was wide disparity in salary paid to practitioners at different levels in public ECCE settings. I did not have access to official documentation of the salary scale or reasons for the salary changes, but viewed participants' pay-slips which showed wide variety in monthly salaries ranging from: TT\$10,000.00 to TT\$6,000.00 for persons with a bachelor's degrees; TT\$4,500.00 to assistant teachers in teacher education degree programs; and TT\$2, 500.00 to assistant teachers not in training. This disparity was also noticed in the salaries paid to graduate practitioners in Tobago, none of whom received more than TT\$6,000.00 monthly; whereas assistant teachers received TT\$2,500.00 monthly. Reasons for this could not be given.

Breaches to the National Standards: Another government mandate that had a negative impact on professionalism in ECCE, is cluster administration of ECCE centers which resulted in practitioners being overworked. When the national ECCE program was first reformed in 2007 and in keeping with the national standards document, each ECCE center was managed by one teacher/administrator; who ideally had a Masters' degree or was engaged in that program and had a minimum of 5 years' experience in ECCE. When a new government came into power in 2011, the new minister of education made several changes in the ECCE sector that according to participants were breaches to the National Standards. One such breach was the clustering of ECCE centers with one administrator managing a cluster of centers. Clusters range in size from three, four, five, and six centers; and no criteria were articulated regarding how administrators were assigned to clusters. Cluster administration led to the most senior or qualified teacher at each ECCE

center having to perform administrative duties when the assigned cluster administrator was not at the center. Additionally, from practitioners' point of view the impact of cluster administration had not been considered, neither had a plan or system of accountability been created to deal with issues that arose. Participants in Trinidad shared the following thoughts:

Royal Blue:

When cluster administration was introduced, we questioned who would be in charge when the administrator was not at a center? And how would situations be handled in the absence of the administrator; no answers were given. I thought we had sunk to an all-time low and things could not get any worse. I envisioned a range of problems, and experience – our history – has not proved me wrong.

Gold:

Some administrators were already grappling with managing one ECCE center effectively, now they are given more centers to manage. To date, cluster administration has not worked. It has led to more work for teachers who although not trained in center management, are coerced into management roles, but really are not in charge of the center.

Black:

Cluster administration had led to increased duties for teachers. For example, when the administrator is absent; management of the center is my responsibility, inclusive of: teaching the group of children assigned to me, registering new children, speaking with parents, guiding assistant teachers and the janitor, meeting with officials who visit, and

handling all situations that arise. My group of children endure constant interruptions and are left unattended while I attend to those matters.

Green:

“When we leave the children unsupervised to attend to administrative duties - our professionalism can be challenged, it is low or nonexistent – our major function and focus – the children are not being served”.

Pink:

There is widespread conflict of interest. Children are unattended, running wild, playing inappropriately, and seeking our attention which is diverted to administrative work. Some of us react inappropriately under this enormous pressure.

A major ill of cluster administration according to practitioners is the additional workload and unreasonable demands on teachers. Practitioners voiced that at those times professionalism is low. The participants feel guilty about leaving children unsupervised and not having time to work with children in small groups. Too often, children get hurt during those lapses in supervision or meaningful engagement. This justifies some parents’ concerns and the public’s general view that professionalism in ECCE is low. Participants used the word unprofessional to describe how information is disseminated throughout the national program; how new mandates; rules and program changes are communicated or handed down to teachers.

Royal Blue expressed the view:

If those in power would demonstrate professionalism it would be easier for others to follow their lead, but when those in authority, like head of the Early Childhood

Division and some administrators are proponents of unprofessional behaviors that set the example for workers. Our administrator has had inappropriate altercations with parents and community members, and head of ECCE has on occasion not been truthful with us.

Increased Pupil Intake.

Another government mandate which negatively impacted ECCE teachers' professionalism is increasing pupil intake at public ECCE centers. Participants said this happened suddenly, without warning, and the limited space per child and for large group activities was filled. The directive to increase attendance by 10 additional children at each government ECCE centre was not accompanied by documentation, additional support staff or increased materials and teaching resources. Available resources already insufficient for the numbers of children being served were now being stretched beyond acceptable limits and were exhausted sooner. Teachers were forced to ask parents for help by providing cleansers, paper towels, glue, poster paints, and other supplies. Some practitioners were seriously reprimanded by administrators for asking parents to contribute, because government mandates articulated that the state would provide all supplies to ECCE centers; and parents were only required to ensure children's attendance.

Royal Blue said:

One day a van pulled up at the center to drop off more furniture – 10 chairs and 1 table - the administrator who was present, then told the staff that we were required to register 10 more children at our center – no discussion – no reason – we already have 40

children in the care of one teacher and two assistant teachers - the maximum our center was built to serve, but we had to do as directed.

Gold:

One day some officials from Organization Safety and Health Act (OSHA) visited my center and were appalled at our overcrowded conditions. They asked why we had so many children at the center, I told them that was a directive from the Ministry, they asked to see documentation which I did not have and left after saying very forcefully to me “this is wrong, is an accident waiting to happen and in breach of OSHA laws.” I passed on that information to the administrator when she visited but she made no comment.

Black:

Overcrowding is a serious problem; it lowers our professionalism. When supplies ran out, I ask a few parents who can afford to donate something to the center. Often, I send my own money to provide teaching resources, because I do not want to engage in ‘miseducation’.

Sky Blue:

Fortunately for us, parent involvement is high at our center. The parents who are able donate supplies to the center every month. I do not know how we would have survived without our parents’ support. But the quality of our program has lowered – our professionalism is in jeopardy – it is at the lower end of the continuum

Purple:

Thankfully, professionalism at my center is good, we have a very good relationship with parents – we have a list of things needed at the center, they tick off

items to provide and have been doing so. This is how we dealt with the increased intake and no increased provisions.

Increased Teacher/Child Ratios.

In 2005, when the draft National Standards for Regulating Early Childhood Services in Trinidad and Tobago - Green Paper was rolled out for national consultation; after which amendments would be made, the document ratified, and adopted as law. In that draft document, the teacher/child ratio was listed as 1:10 for 3 to 4-year-old children and 1:12 for 4 to 5-year-old children. However, such ideal early learning conditions were short lived. They did not become reality. The final document – The White Paper – states “the teacher/child ratio for 3 – 5 year-olds as 1: 15 (maximum)” (p. 4). Thus, from inception the teacher/child ratio in the national early childhood care and education program was high. The word maximum was interpreted by policymakers to mean minimum, every group was made-up of 15 children, and staff was recruited on that 1:15 ratio.

Additionally, a new mandate specifying that 5% of the overall attendance at each ECCE centre be comprised of children with special needs was handed down in 2011, but not written into the Standards. The Standards state “where children with special needs are attending, lower staff ration may be necessary and will be negotiated on an individual basis” (p. 5). Participants reported writing to the ECCE Division about children with special needs and providing documentation of the children’s characteristics, but no special intervention services or support were provided. The document further states: “specialist support to meet children’s medical, speech, language or behavioral needs may

be required, and it will be necessary for staff to liaise with relevant colleagues in other services” (p. 9). This coupled with the mandate to increase pupil intake at each center has raised teacher/child ratios and having children with special needs in that group exacerbated the difficult work conditions. Yet, practitioners’ pleas for a lowered 1:10 ratio, early intervention services and support, and supplying resources and materials fell on deaf ears. For example:

Green said:

The increased teacher/child ratio is a challenge. Each teacher and assistant teacher starts the academic year with 15 children, but as registration continues year round that number increases. For example, I started first term with 15 children, 1 month into the term that number changed to 17. Then I am told to expect a new child the next week, so my group became 18. By the end of that term, my group had 20 children including one with social/emotional issues. That has lowered my professionalism – I cannot give individual attention to all 20 children daily.

Purple said:

“I have 17 children in my class; two of them have behavioral problems. No early intervention services, provisions or assistance for children with special needs are available. My professionalism is at an all time low”.

Gold said:

When attendance in my class is low - 10 or less children – we have a peaceful, great learning day. I wish the minister of education could see us on low attendance days;

then he would understand that a lower child/teacher ratio is a crucial aspect of quality education and teacher professionalism.

Sky Blue:

Now each center has more children, is overcrowded. The ministry just sent more furniture and demanded that we take in more children, so the teacher child ratios at centers increased to 1: 18 or 1: 20. Again our national Standards are being breached.

Black said:

When there is a child with special needs in the group, that child sets the tone and pace for the day – everything depends on that child’s state or mood. It is very stressful working with that child. I read or search the internet for strategies and activities to help the undiagnosed child. I observe the child’s struggles, but do not know what to do.

Green:

As far as the government is concerned, they have trained us in special education. They sent us to a 2-week seminar on strategies for working with children with special education needs and gave us a certificate at the end. But, that does not make us special education teachers. We may be causing more harm than good.

Participants pointed out that the issues of cluster administration, increasing pupil intake including children with special needs, higher teacher/child ratios, and non-provision of supplies are breaches of the national standards which regulate the provision of early childhood care and education services in Trinidad and Tobago. All participants expressed the view that all the mandates (new changes implemented from 2011) have lowered teacher professionalism, and increased the problems plaguing the ECCE sector.

Problems arising from those breaches in the national standards that lower professionalism according to participants are:

Gold:

When you want to do art activities and there is not paint, and we are not to ask parents for anything; a teacher can either forgo doing art and craft activities or purchase art supplies for each child out of her pay; what she does impacts her professionalism.

Sky Blue:

“No one asks us early childhood teachers what we need to do our work, even when we request what we need, it is not provided. We are at our wits end”.

Black:

Because I am a professional, I spend a lot of my money buying teaching resources/materials that I cannot make. I use recyclable materials, but these resources do not last long as they cannot withstand the constant manipulation of small, developing hands.

Lilac:

Those of us with a School Board are lucky, because the School Board engages in fund raisers to buy supplies and teaching resources for the center. Now the THA is looking into providing some teaching materials to ECCE centers.

Green:

Those new mandates are violations of our national Standards – the quality standards of our ECCE program. The job is more stressful, they have taken the joy out of my work with the children and lowered my professionalism.

Gold:

I thought national Standards were fixed – could not be changed on a whim or because it was expedient to do so. No research had been conducted, no dialogue held with practitioners on which the government could justify making those changes. Who is advising this?

Some participants were of the view that all those changes to the standards made management of ECCE center more difficult. The participants felt that could be one reason administrators passed on so much of the work to teachers. Teachers are demotivated and frustrated, teachers complained about the lack of teaching resources, are very upset about spending personal money to facilitate curriculum delivery, some simply could not afford to do so, and others are adamant about not spending personal funds for the program.

Four participants said the following:

Green:

Early childhood teachers keep up their end of the contract terms and conditions, we are at work every day even during the holidays when other teachers are at home with their families, but the government do not keep their end of the contract – they have not paid any of us the 10% gratuity at the end of each contract period, after we have done all (and more than) what was required of us. This is grossly unfair.

Black:

This may sound bad – but why should I continue doing my all, giving of my limited finances, when the government cannot pay me what is stated in my employment

contract? If and when they pay me the three sets of 10% gratuity owed, then I will consider giving back – spending - some of that money in the center.

Royal Blue:

The government should probably look into private enterprise investment in ECCE – the business sector – partnering with them to provide supplies to ECCE centers. Or the government could start dialogue with businesses located in each community about adopting their community government ECCE centers by providing supplies every term as a percentage reduction in or exemption from annual taxation.

Sky Blue:

“When the program started in 2007, the then government provided all supplies and teaching materials every term. We took an inventory which informed what was supplied the next term. Why was this discontinued?”

Another issue related to and impacting teacher professionalism is governments’ failure to pay utility bills which results in electricity and telephone services to ECCE centers being disconnected. It takes the government several months - in some cases as much as two academic terms to settle outstanding payments. Affected centers are without electrical and telephone services until connections are restored.

Royal Blue:

“Our telephone bill was not paid, and it was disconnected. We used our cellphones to call parents. To date we have not been reimbursed for being professionals, for maintaining communication with parents at our own cost”.

Gold:

Our electricity was disconnected, drinks could not be cooled, lunches could not be warmed, water was consumed at room temperature, the classroom was hot and humid, children and teachers were hot and sweaty, the children were restless, and parents complained about those conditions. We endured this for four months.

Sky Blue:

Why do officials allow utilities to ECCE centers to be disconnected for nonpayment of bills? I do not see those things happening at primary and secondary schools. Why isn't the same importance and attention given to early childhood?

Participants in both Trinidad and Tobago felt strongly that the treatment of ECCE practitioners by government officials; left a lot to be desired, added to job stressors, dissatisfaction, and disenchantment. In the view of participants, all of the above, the physical stress and trauma experienced working in such oppressive conditions negatively impacted professionalism – how the job was performed. Early childhood practitioners could not understand and are disturbed by this. Some participants said:

Green:

I do not think they know what to make of us. We are well educated, tolerate all the maltreatment, and continue signing the inhumane employment contracts. They think we cannot do better, or we are desperate for employment. That maybe so for some, but some of us choose ECCE as our vocation and are not respected for it.

Lilac:

ECCE is something I was called to do. Another type of job did not interest me. So, I tolerate and make a lot of sacrifices to be in ECCE. The bad treatment and lack of recognition is sometimes painful and depressing, but I focus on the children.

Royal Blue:

This is what I was meant to do – I tell friends I have not worked a day in ECCE – it is a labor of love. I focus on the children, who are my reason for being in ECCE. I talk about how we are treated with family members who understand my passion and pain, and with colleagues experiencing the same things. It is comforting knowing I am not alone in this struggle.

Pink:

Early childhood is a vocation to me, now I am focused on special education in early childhood. I get tremendous job satisfaction when I see children progress and move on to primary school. I know that I have touched that child's life positively and have made a contribution to humanity.

Theme # 2.

Positive impacts.

Unanimously, the participants expressed appreciation and gratitude for the Government Assistance Tertiary Education (GATE) program through which higher education was accessed and undergraduate degrees earned that were required for promotion to teacher at public ECCE centers. Through the GATE program government paid the tuition fees for each student teacher over the 4 years to completion of the first degree, thus making tertiary education available to all suitably qualified citizens. Some

practitioners desirous of becoming administrator/teachers had engaged postgraduate studies and earned a Masters' in Education degree. The GATE program paid half of tuition fees for each student teacher on that program. Participants reported:

As soon as the standards were introduced, I applied to the Bachelor's in Education program and was accepted. At that time – in 2004 – the Draft Standards said to become an Early Childhood Teacher one should possess a first degree in any of the following disciplines: early childhood care and education, child psychology or sociology. I decided on child psychology. Unfortunate for me, when the Standards were adopted that clause was changed to possessing a first degree in Early Childhood Care and Education. I feel abused, someone tricked me.

Giving ECCE practitioners GATE was the best thing that happened to us. The government realized that on our small salaries - ranging between TT\$1,000.00 (without a Basic Certificate in ECCE) and TT\$2,500.00 monthly (with a Basic Certificate) we could not pay for tertiary education. A small country like our doing this to develop its human capital was huge.

When the GATE program came on stream, I jumped at the opportunity to earn a first degree in ECCE. I am the first in my family to attend university – that was a huge step – Two years after completing the first degree I started the Masters' in special education and was successful.

Without GATE, I would not have been able to access tertiary education. The administration at that time valued EC teachers and appreciated the importance of teacher

education and qualification in attaining quality early childhood education. We are not so valued now.

Participants also expressed other benefits of tertiary education as personal development in terms of being better able to provide for families, better skilled, sense of self-worth and a higher more positive self-concept. Professionalism improved in terms of the knowledge base inclusive of developmentally appropriate pedagogy, and becoming reflective practitioners and researchers when planning curriculum to meet the diverse needs presented in classrooms.

Sky Blue:

After observing the children's interest and questioning them, we decide on a theme. I research the topic and start developing a topic web. I value that research, I feel grounded and more knowledgeable about the topic. I am better prepared to answer questions posed by the children. Before the degree, I did not research topics, and feel guilty about what I did before.

Green:

I am more professional in how I approach my work, I am better prepared for teaching, accessing or making appropriate resources for activities. I am more thoughtful and intentional when working with children. That happened because of my education in early childhood.

Gold:

I can no longer enter a classroom without resources and a well-developed plan. A lot of my family time is spent making resources. I am more disciplined about planning

and those things. My professionalism has improved. Every box can be a teaching resource for my children

Yellow:

My work has become more child-centered. I have joined NAEYC and share the quarterly magazine with colleagues; we discuss new research findings and try implementing some. Many ideas in my classroom are from the young children magazine.

Participants who attained the first degree were promoted to teacher. While others with a postgraduate degree were promoted to teacher/administrator and earned a higher salaries.

Sky Blue:

After years of earning under TT\$1,000.00 monthly, I now earn way above that. I am still the teacher at my center but my work and the interactions with children and peers is more professional. My professionalism has certainly improved.

Theme # 3.

Similarities and difference between Trinidad and Tobago: The four participants in Tobago were very concerned about the disparities that exist between ECCE services and provisions in the two islands. They articulated the following similarities and differences in the ECCE sector on the islands. From 2005 until 2016, EC practitioners who had a first degree received tertiary education at the same institution and have the same quality degrees. Yet, practitioners in Trinidad are paid higher salaries than those in Tobago and had different work terms and conditions. Both groups of teachers are voiceless. The participants said:

I have many colleagues in Trinidad we graduated together from the undergraduate degree. But my colleagues in Trinidad get a higher salary than I do. None of us – EC teachers - in Tobago are paid TT\$8,000.00 monthly, while we are paid only TT\$6,000.00.

I am aware that Trinidad has administrators, but this year (2016) the THA recruited three persons for the post of EC coordinator, with the same job description as the administrators, but they are paid TT\$7,000.00 compared to the TT\$12,000.00 to TT\$15,000.00 being paid to administrators in Trinidad.

It is only last year – October 2016 - since the THA took over ECCE in Tobago, those of us with a degree started receiving a salary of TT\$6,000.00 monthly. But EC teachers in Trinidad were given higher salaries after graduation; their salaries are higher than ours. That's not fair.

When I questioned the difference in salaries between Trinidad and Tobago, I was told by someone in the THA that EC teachers in Trinidad are paid to work during the vacation period, but we are not, we are on vacation like other teachers.

“Colleagues in Trinidad tell me about the professional development workshops they are mandated to attend, we are not offered those opportunities”.

Conversely, practitioners in Trinidad lamented having to work during vacation periods: 3 weeks in December at Christmas, 3 weeks in March/April at Easter, and 7 weeks in July/August. Practitioners' cries had fallen on deaf ears, many are burnt-out and need a break to rest and recuperate; some have developed health problem ranging from high blood pressure, diabetes, and other stress related ailments. At the time of data

collection, some practitioners had attained representation from the Trinidad and Tobago Unified Teachers' Association (TTUTA) who had commenced dialogue with the current government to address concerns including: no vacation leaves, nonpayment of owed gratuity, and discontinuation of contract employment. Practitioners in Trinidad did not seem aware of the salary differences between Trinidad and Tobago. No participant from Trinidad mentioned it. Additionally, those participants did not mention practitioners in Tobago being on vacation, in contrast, practitioners in Trinidad were mandated to be at their ECCE centers during vacation periods.

The participants reported that historically, disparities have always existed between Trinidad and Tobago. As a ward of Trinidad, Tobago's governance was distal. Almost everything had to come from Trinidad. Tobagonians had to make the 8-hour sea journey by ferry to Trinidad to conduct business. Currently, faster ferry vessels make the sea voyage in 3 hours while air travel takes approximately 30 minutes.

Over the years, Trinidad decentralized governance by facilitating Tobago's establishment of the Tobago House of Assembly (THA) and gradually relinquished certain government responsibilities to people in Tobago. Every year, the THA received fiscal allocations from the national budget to manage Tobago's affairs. But self-governance is not finite. Trinidad still maintained overall control. For example, at the time of data collection the THA was in discussions with Trinidad to approve and sign a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) regarding terms and conditions of contract employment inclusive of appropriate remuneration for ECCE practitioners in Tobago.

Right now, the THA is waiting for Trinidad to sign the MOU. They keep saying to us, things will get better soon. So, we are waiting for that MOU to know whether we have to sign contracts and what those contracts will require of us.

The MOU will bring contract employment for ECCE teachers in Tobago – that may be problematic, especially if they want us to work during the holidays. The contracts may bring a few benefits like professional development workshops, providing more materials and teaching resources, better maintenance of ECCE Centers, and maybe other ECCE teachers will access higher education and earn a degree. I am trying to look on the bright side.

“We do not know what the MOU will bring, so we have adopted a ‘wait and see’ attitude and pray that the hardships posed in Trinidad are not replicated for us. We’ll see”.

According to practitioners in Tobago, another difference between Trinidad’s and Tobago’s ECCE sectors is that, practitioners in Trinidad was mandated to adhere to the national standards and all the changes made by government, those mandated changes were not handed down to practitioners in Tobago. For example, every ECCE center in both Trinidad and Tobago received copies of the national standards document and the national curriculum guide. However, even though training workshops on the implementation and use of those documents were conducted in Trinidad, no workshops were held in Tobago. Generally, Trinidad was compliant with the standards and curriculum expectations whereas Tobago was not. Practitioners in Tobago reported not having a clear understanding of the national standards and curriculum guide; most had

not even read the documents. Participants in Tobago lamented that no copy of the School Code of Conduct was given to ECCE centers. Many did not know such a document existed. In light of the above, it can be said that teacher professionalism in terms of obedience to mandates was high in Trinidad but low in Tobago. Three participants in Tobago stated:

I have not read the standards document, but I have read some parts of the curriculum guide. I do not understand how center-based active learning is to be done. My peers in Trinidad tried explaining it, but I do not understand. I guess, I need to see it in practice to get a better grasp of what is expected.

We in Tobago did not use the standards document. We tried to use the curriculum guide but need help to understand what is required of us, for example how to do a project and center time. I hear different things from people in Trinidad. In Tobago we call it free-play, is that the same thing? We work with themes selected by the teachers and children.

The Standards document and curriculum guide are way above the heads of many EC teachers in Tobago. Many of them are not trained, do not have degrees and even if they read the documents – which I doubt – they would not have understood it. Teachers in Tobago would have needed workshops in how to use those documents and to implement Standards and curriculum expectations.

Research Subquestion 4.

The fourth research question addressed what practitioners thought government should do to solve and alleviate the negative impacts of mandates on teacher professionalism in ECCE. Some participants thought that ECCE practitioners had a crucial role to play in minimizing the negative impacts of government mandates by choosing how to respond to and implement mandates. Participants believed that all practitioners should uphold best practice in ECCE and continue providing the caring, nurturing interactions and developmental curriculum vital to optimizing outcomes for young children. All participants expressed views that government should dialogue to begin the process of crafting a definition of teacher professionalism in ECCE and how that professionalism can be identified. Such conversations participants felt would lead to and support the need for infrastructural improvements lacking in the sector that limit professionalism. Participants thought those improvements would be motivational and would enhance professionalism in the sector.

Research question four aligned with the seventh theme made up of the following 11 subthemes: on-going dialogue with practitioners; revision of official documents to reflect practitioners' voices and research findings; payment of outstanding gratuity; continuous professional development; one administrator for each center; further training of administrators; lower teacher/child ratios; timely repairs and provision of supplies; continuous evaluation of centers by stakeholders; early intervention for children with special needs; and public sensitization of roles and functions of early childhood practitioners. These subthemes are discussed further in this section. Generally,

participants wanted the new government to revisit the guidelines on professionalism and rescind some of the new mandates created by the last administration. In practitioners' views those changes were ill advised and have eroded professionalism in ECCE.

Theme # 1.

On-going official/practitioner dialogue.

All participants expressed several ways government should address the negative impact of mandates on professionalism in ECCE. Several novel ideas were offered as solutions to the negative impacts of mandates. Some participants made the following identical statements: officials should have ongoing dialogue with ECCE practitioners:

Green stated:

Why does government not talk with us? There should be continuous dialogue between officials and ECCE teachers. We are in the trenches – we live all dynamics, issues, incidents – we have a first hand view of what happens in the sector – they need to speak with us.

Gold stated:

We ECCE teachers have so much information to share with officials, if only they would dialogue with us. Ask us what is happening at our centers, ask about the children, their needs, issues we are encountering daily, and how they can help us do a better job.

Sky Blue stated:

Officials need to change how they view us – to see us as partners in ECCE – we have a lot of information which can help improve the sector. That dialogue will help us

improve our professionalism, because we will be opening up our work for review and critique – this will make us stronger.

Black stated:

A better system for managing and reporting issues at centers must be devised. Talking with ECCE teachers at least once a year – listening to us about what is happening - new trends in the sector - will go a long way to improving what we do – improving our professionalism.

Royal Blue stated:

The government needs to give us job security. They need to speak with us often – we need to share the information we have so better decisions can be made for ECCE. Speak with us rather than holding the contract over our heads, like the Sword of Damocles.

Theme # 2.

Revise official documents to reflect practitioners' voices and research findings.

Participants agreed that official documents are more than 10 years old and in urgent need of revision. The participants cautioned that revisions should be informed by and reflect dialogue with practitioners and current local research findings. Additionally, the participants strongly agreed that any revision not so informed would be useless and not focused on improving professionalism in Trinidad and Tobago's ECCE sector.

Sky Blue:

Through dialogue with us officials will get a better sense of what is happening in our classrooms, the status of our professionalism, can be impressed upon to conduct research into the ECCE which will inform revisions to the standards document and curriculum guide.

Green:

“When we talk with officials, we can arrive at a better guide for professionalism in our ECCE settings which can be written into official documents and appraisal forms. This will certainly improve teacher professionalism in ECCE”.

Purple:

“The officials must be revised if they want to improve what is happening in ECCE. Also, the government must conduct research in ECCE to guide revisions, so it really meets the particular ECCE needs of Trinidad and Tobago”.

Gold:

“Allowing us to conduct Action research in our classrooms will provide information vital to improving the sector. Revision to official documents should not be done without such information”.

Theme # 3.

Payment of outstanding gratuity.

There was a resounding outcry from participants working at government ECCE centers in Trinidad, about government’s failure to pay the 10% gratuity stipulated by law and due at the end of each contract period. The participants felt very strongly that the government is in breach of contract terms and conditions; good industrial relations.

Participants expressed having kept up all part of the contract, and it was incumbent on government to do likewise. This the participants said was the greatest travesty and disrespect meted out to ECCE practitioners. Some voiced that professionalism in ECCE is low because payment to ECCE practitioners, stipulated by law is not made.

Gold said:

I have served three contract cycles and to date have not received the 10% gratuity for the first, second, neither the third contract. I planned my life on the understanding that this money would come – so my family's debt can be reduced.

Royal Blue said:

My family tells me to look on the bright side, government has money for me they must pay it. I am thinking of not signing another contract if the gratuity is not paid. We work hard, do not have holidays, and go to work every day; at least pay us what we are due.

Purple said:

To protect my sanity and prevent becoming depressed, I have given up hope of receiving the gratuity owed. It is unfair to us who have worked so hard, against such odds to not receive the financial compensation stated in our employment contract. This is the new face of slavery.

Theme # 4.

Continuous professional development.

The participants spoke about a lack of or discontinued professional development events. Participants explained that in the early days, before the reform agenda of 2005,

when SERVOL was the state's agent for training and supervision of early childhood programs nationwide; there were monthly inservice workshops in every education division for ECCE practitioners. The participants hailed those workshops as spaces where professionalism was enhanced in terms of curriculum content and pedagogy; interpersonal relationships and team work; parent and community involvement; sharing ideas, strategies and techniques; and generally providing practitioners with breathing space to affirm and support each other. The reformed ECCE program had that component, but gradually it diminished and became nonexistent, resulting in stagnation, frustration, apathy, and inappropriate practice.

Sky Blue stated:

Initially, that was the reason government required early childhood teachers to work during the vacation periods – to engage professional development sessions. We saw a gradual decline in the frequency and content of those workshops. Topics were being repeated too often and the reinforcement factor became drudgery.

Red stated:

I was always envious of teachers at the government centers, they attended so many workshops which we in the private sector were not invited to. Sometimes I would read literature provided at those workshops from friends. Whenever an organization puts on workshops about special education I attend.

Royal Blue stated:

In the early days, professional development workshops occurred every month. We recommended topics to be presented; there were demonstrations of best practice and lots

of discussion. I left those workshops feeling renewed, empowered, and ready to tackle whatever came. But now, the Division's plan is to recycle certain topics each year.

Purple stated:

“Professional development should be a planned program – not ad hoc – but needs based, for example on areas of weakness observed in the program. A better model of professional development for ECCE practitioners is needed”.

Orange stated:

I wish we had the opportunities to attend professional development workshops like teachers in Trinidad. The THA said they will be providing those and I look forward to attending so I can better have informed and get new ideas for my classroom.

Pink stated:

Early childhood teachers in Tobago are in dire need of continuous professional development, because many of them are not trained in ECCE, and those who are trained have worked at the same center all their lives, so their experience is limited. They need to experience other ways of doing things, observe other centers, and gain new and more teaching strategies. This would reenergize and motivate them and improve professionalism in Tobago.

Theme # 5.

Appoint one administrator to each ECCE center.

Several participants emphasized urgency for government to change cluster administration by placing one administrator at each ECCE center, just as primary and secondary school where there is one principal to each school. Practitioners felt that center

management would be more effective, ECCE centers would develop exponentially with one appointed person at the helm, and teachers' professionalism would improve. The participants said that administrators would have more time to get to know the staff, children, parents, community, and resources within; to develop and implement appropriate curriculum and relevant programs; forge better partnerships, higher parent/community involvement, and outreach for the growth, development, and sustainability of ECCE centers. Those outcomes are not being realized given the current management structure. Participants expressed the following options available to government for discontinuation of cluster administration: promote suitably qualified teachers to administrative positions; employ more administrators; and provide specialized education and training in center management, leadership, and administration for persons recruited as administrators.

Royal Blue:

When I joined ECCE, each center was managed by one head teacher – who was the administrator performing relevant duties and a teacher with a group of children, but an assistant teacher was attached to her group so that children were not left unattended when other duties called. Things worked very well, center management was smooth. Problems were minimal and easily resolved, people worked as a team.

Green:

We in Trinidad have a habit of copying 'models' from developed countries, without thinking of our unique cultural contexts. Wherever they observed that 'cluster administration model' they should also have observed the systems which supported its

utility and effectiveness; and how it aligned to that country's education structure. Cluster administration does not work for us or in our educational context. We need a more direct, hands on, visible, on site approach to center management.

According to Green:

Historically and culturally, citizens of Trinidad and Tobago expect the administrator or principal of a school to be visible at the school every day; to handle any situation that may arise, drive instruction and curriculum, and for efficient effective management of the school. That individual is viewed as the 'daily point person' who is accessible to pupils, staff, parents, and the public to advise and solve problems, network the wider community for the greater good of students and the community.

Black:

I have been thinking of way to make cluster administration work and came up with: Reducing the number of centers in a cluster to two; appoint more suitable and qualified persons to each paired centers, for example, someone who knows the joint communities; and every year involve teachers and parents in appraisals of their administrator.

Purple:

The many problems, incidents, and issues of inappropriate behavior at ECCE centers, are testimonies of how ineffective cluster administration is. In ECCE we need daily on site administration to develop and maintain professionalism.

Theme # 6.

Further training for administrators.

Participants at government ECCE centers unanimously voices the need for further training for administrators in areas of: Managing ECCE programs; human resource management; home, school and community relations, networking, and curriculum and program development. They believed such training would result in development in personnel and programs and drive improvements in teacher professionalism. According to:

Black:

“Some administrators do not know how to manage an ECCE center, so they rely on us – the experienced teachers for help. It is unfair that they are placed in positions for which they are ill equipped”.

Royal Blue:

“I think the administrators should receive further training in all aspects of ECCE program manage or administration. Then we will see a marked improvement in what they do, staff morale and professionalism”.

Green:

“Some administrators are from the primary school setting, have never worked in ECCE so they really do not know what pertains and how to manage an ECCE center. They need to be trained for the position”.

Gold:

“Having a Master’s in Education does not make one suitable for or knowledgeable in management of an ECCE center”.

Theme # 7.

Lower teacher/child ratios.

Participants were unanimous and empathic in asking for a lower teacher child ratio at ECCE centers. The participants lamented the inability to provide one on one instruction to meet individual need, feared some children were being underserved, professionalism was lowered, quality almost nonexistent, and reiterated the extreme difficulties experienced when the group included a child with special educational needs. The participants felt that the national standards are 10 plus years old and in urgent need of review, which should be informed by local research findings, dialogue with practitioners and reflect practitioners' voices.

Purple stated:

Every teacher and assistant teacher has a group of 15 children. Although experienced teachers can cope with that number and use differentiated instructions, many days do not go well or as planned. Inexperienced teachers have great difficulty working with that many children. Their classroom management is weak, so too pedagogy.

Sky Blue stated:

The teacher/child ratio must be lowered to 1: 10 for 3 years olds and 1: 12 for 4 to 5 year olds. Such a ratio will enable us to give individual attention to each child thus improving their outcomes and enhance professionalism in ECCE.

Green stated:

Where is the quality in teachers having 20 children in a group including a child with special needs? On a good day, a teacher may be able to give individual attention to 10 children during small group time. What about the other 10? Their needs have not been

met – those children are being robbed of meaningful early education. Professionalism is low.

Theme # 8.

Timely repairs of supplies and provisions.

Another area which participants felt government should address to reduce the negative impact of mandates on teacher professionalism, is facilities: repairing the building and its amenities; supplies – cleansers, sanitizers, office supplies, teaching resources and materials. The national ECCE program had been neglected for the past 3 years. The last government stopped sending maintenance teams to center to repairs the physical plant and its amenities. Other services and provisions were discontinued.

Participants expressed the following:

Green said:

It is 3 years since our center was visited by a maintenance team. We have lots of structural problems – water does not drain from the shower stall, two of the children’s toilets are not working, three places in the classroom the nonskid flooring has lifted and is a tripping hazard to everyone at the center.

Purple said:

At my center, the toilets do no work properly – water keeps backing up and overflowing. Some of the windows cannot be opened because the brackets are broken, therefore the classroom is always hot. Four of the ceiling fans are not working.

Sky Blue said:

During the rainy season our playground floods, the water takes days to drain off, and we are plagued by mosquitoes, and frogs. The children cannot use the outdoor play equipment for weeks when that happens. The water pump had gone bad, so when there is no water in the community's water mains – we are without water and have to send children home early.

Gold said:

The access gate to the compound has fallen three times, it is very heavy, and I have difficulty moving it. That is dangerous as anyone can be seriously injured if the gate falls on him/her. We avoid that part of the yard. Two of our ceiling fans wobble so violently that we have stopped using them. My center also has a plumbing problem.

Royal Blue said:

Another concern is the lack of teaching resources. The government gives each center TT\$3,000.00 every term to purchase supplies. They have no idea how very expensive teaching resources are and to cater for 65 children is difficult.

Lilac said:

The computers at my center have not worked for the past 3 years, we cannot fix them, and no one has been sent to do so. The building is old - more than 10 years old - in dire need of repairs, and a facelift. It is not a welcoming sight.

Black said:

When it rains my center floods! Teachers place children in a dry spot, roll up their pants legs, grab brooms, and sweep water out. Our outdoor play area comprises of one metal bar on a tripod (unpadded, with no seats) - a see saw. I do not let the children use it.

Theme # 9.**Continuous evaluation of centers by stakeholders.**

Some participants thought that government should include annual evaluation of ECCE centers by stakeholders: staff, parents, community members to attain information and perceptions of the national program, its staff, and their professionalism. This information would highlight centers meeting community needs, model centers that could be used for teacher inservice training and exchange programs. Teachers could be seconded in-training to model centers for one or two academic terms, during which they would be mentored by peers, acquire best practices and heightened professionalism which they can apply at home centers upon return.

Royal Blue:

Our center is a model center, professionalism is high – we do all that is expected of us, but do officials know this? If annual evaluations of centers are done by all persons involved, officials will get a better picture of what should happen across all centers and use us as a training school.

Purple:

“Our high professionalism is not recognized. Government can use us to advertise what ECCE is about and to train other teachers. Especially in Center Based Active Learning and the Project approach”.

Green:

There are a few very good – high performing ECCE centers in Trinidad. Government should use these to train new or assistant teachers. Place them at those schools on a short internship, then send them back to their communities.

Theme # 10.

Early intervention for children with special education needs.

This was another very troubling issue for most practitioners. The participants are of the view that the national ECCE program is incapable of serving children with special educational needs, and that the inclusion of a ‘social service room’ in new building did not meet the special needs encountered. The government mandated that 5% of each center’s intake be children with special needs but was not supported or facilitated by the provision of appropriate tools, personnel, and services to adequately treat with those special needs. Children with special educational needs are not being served at government ECCE centers, and it is misleading to tell the nation that their needs are catered to. Participants felt that this is one area where professionalism in ECCE could justifiably be challenged.

Gold said:

Increasingly we see more children with special needs in our classrooms, but cannot deal with them. One suitably qualified special education teacher is needed at each ECCE center and that person must also have all the tools – assistive technology, services, and materials to help children with special needs.

Royal Blue said:

For years, my heartbreak was and continues to be the plight of young children with special needs. For me, it's about enabling the child to function prosocially, to self regulate, to acquire basic foundational skills and hope that's sufficient to take the child through the primary school system. That's the best I can hope for.

Pink said:

Because young children with special educational needs are not being served in our national ECCE program, I decided to study 'special education' for my postgraduate degree. I am surprised that my services are not being utilized in ECCE. I work at a private 'special education schools' rather than ECCE I am qualified for.

Black said:

The kinds of maladjusted behavior problems I have encountered at our center need special early intervention. Some of those children come from environments in which violence is high – sadly, almost a way of life – we need to intervene early to reverse adverse outcomes. Successive governments have failed young children with special needs. I feel guilty when they leave us to enter primary school, because I know they have not yet acquired sufficient self regulation and learning skills.

Green said:

Sending us to a 2-week workshop on strategies for working with special needs does not make us special education teachers. We do not know how to assess the children's progress. The strategies we learnt do not work in many cases. I fear we are doing more harm than good.

Purple said:

Inclusion is good and I support it but can only work when all support services are available and with qualified persons at the helm. The government should have mandated that children be diagnosed and possess an IEP. We could have done some good then, but without that we are just a unprovision holding bay for young children with special needs.

Yellow said:

We cannot help young children with special needs at our center. For one, some buildings do not have ramps, railings, toilet or shower stalls equipped for children with special needs. For another, we are not trained for working with children with special needs.

Red said:

I opened a Special Needs Pre-school because many young children with special education needs were not being served. I had worked at the special needs school for a number of years, had experience and some training. I can only serve a small number, my teacher/child ratio depends on the level of disability, at most it is 1: 5.

Brown said:

“Many young children with special needs are underserved in Tobago, because what they need may be available in Trinidad or only in developed countries”.

Theme # 11.

Public sensitization of roles and functions of early childhood practitioners.

Several participants felt that government erred or missed the opportunity to sensitize the general public about the crucial importance of the roles and functions early childhood teachers performed in the program, serving the nation’s youngest. Participants

felt strongly that this would aid and encourage better parent and community partnership with teachers, improve how teachers are viewed generally, and what is expected in ECCE. The participants lamented that successive governments spoke about early childhood care and education programs in terms of what the government will do and has done for young children. Successive government have used the national program as a political football; it was an election winning slogan. Yet have failed to speak about the people who are charged with delivery of same, the people on whose shoulders the burden fell, the front-line, go-to persons in ECCE.

A missed opportunity to outline the qualifications, personal qualities, and characteristics of early childhood teachers. Because of this, the general public continues to view early childhood practitioners as untrained, voluntary workers, not as qualified professionals in a specialized, expert discipline. Governments have not demonstrated or articulated appreciation for and valuing of early childhood practitioners. The participants felt strongly that the national community reflected government's disdain for and disregard of early childhood educators. Participants believe it is not too late; government could start now given that practitioners are in the national news, lobbying for owed gratuity and better working conditions.

Gold expressed:

The governments - all of them – have not spoken highly of ECCE teachers. They have not told the public about our qualifications and professionalism. It's as if concepts and skills will be acquired just by being in - what they like to call the 'state of the art'

buildings – Governments’ disdain, lack of respect and appreciation, is deafening in their silence.

Black expressed:

I have not heard the government, or any minister of education speak highly about early childhood teachers. When Minister Gopeesingh was on national television and questioned about us; he said, “if early childhood teachers are professionals, they will do all that is expected of them.” By no stretch of the imagination that was a loaded statement!

Sky Blue expressed:

On call in radio programs, parents complained about early childhood teachers not being at centers to receive children at 6 o’clock in the morning. Even though I understand the parents’ plight, it is unreasonable to expect early childhood teachers to be at centers at that time, but the minister of education responded by saying: “if we are professionals, we will do what is expected of us!” This was a missed opportunity to inform the public of our professional roles and to defend us.

Green expressed:

To date the government has not said one uplifting word about early childhood teachers! Ministers ‘big up’ the police, the army, nurses, doctors, lawyers, sanitation workers, public servants, but no minister has ever spoken positively about us. That silence questions our professionalism!

Royal Blue expressed:

I rely on the beneficiaries - the children, the parents, and the community – to share and advertise my work – they are a more reliable and valid source of information because they are at the center every day and interact with me. My clients are the best judge of my worth and professionalism!

Orange expressed:

Many Tobagonians in ECCE do not access the training because people think we do not need training or education to mind young children. Most families will not support persons wanting to earn a degree in early childhood. When I was studying people said: “what she doing a degree for, she thing she better than us.”

Lilac expressed:

Tobago is very close-knit; almost everyone is related in some way. To most parents its’ a matter of sending my child by my cousin’s, sister-in-law, and aunt’s pre-school. Early childhood to them is a baby-sitting service. Some bring their children in at age four, to get them ready for entry into primary school at age 5. The importance of ECCE is not recognized or appreciated by many Tobagonians.

Participants believe that should the government publicize the importance of early childhood teachers, parents and the national community would view practitioners differently as qualified educators who provided quality care and educational experiences for young children. Additionally, parents and the public would attend to what teachers say, forge better partnerships with early educators, and become actively involved in the national program. Such a reality would become the catalyst to exponential improvement in professionalism in the early childhood sector of Trinidad and Tobago.

The above views expressed by participants demonstrate professionalism, wealth of knowledge, experience, commitment, and dedication to the national ECCE program. It also evidences practitioners' desire to partner with government for improved services and professionalism in the sector. Although practitioners are frustrated and disillusioned, the participants are still hopeful that positive change and improved professionalism can be attained via ongoing dialogue between officials and practitioners; and by all ECCE practitioners engaging more consistently in best practices appropriate for working with young children and their families. The participants await the day when those conversations will commence.

The seven themes that emerged from the data were derived from coding and interpreting participants' responses to the four research questions. Participants' displayed a range of emotions when relating experiences in the ECCE sector. The participants expressed that engagement in the study provided relief and catharsis. Practitioners' experiences which were consistently highlighted throughout the interviews, focus groups and journals; supported practitioners' and EYPs' experiences learnt of in Chapter 2. This will be elaborated upon through discussion in Chapter 5. Generally, each participant was discontented with the status of the ECCE sector in Trinidad and Tobago. The participants felt that the sector had regressed by years, and that the work of local pioneers was lost. Participants expressed hope that this study would bring about dialogue between government officials and all stakeholders; that would be the catalytic driver of changes needed to revitalize the sector and uplift professionalism to meet international standards of quality. This participants said, coupled with practitioners' views being reflected in

future government mandates would be advantageous to improving teacher professionalism in Trinidad and Tobago's ECCE sector.

Discrepant Cases

During the interviews and focus groups some participants used the words "professional" and "unprofessional" when responding to prompts. I asked for an explanation of the word in the context in which it was used and restated the question. This enabled participants to think deeply about work experience and focus the responses to convey a more vivid picture of the experience. Participants' descriptions became richer and more detailed. I underlined and listed similarities and differences in experiences to gain a deeper understanding. One participant spoke about being deeply affected by two children's lives the still caused sleepless nights. That participant referred to having an uncanny feeling that something was amiss with a child who appeared to be alright upon arrival at the center. I probed the response asking to be told more about the incident without identifying the child. What unfolded was a case of child abuse that was not dealt with in accordance to the child protection laws of Trinidad and Tobago. One clause of the child protection law stated that any teacher who suspected child abuse and failed to report it to the relevant authorities, would upon investigation be summarily charged TT\$25,000.00 and serve a 6 months' jail sentence.

I could not ignore that information. The participant spoke tearfully and at length about the incident, the administrator's inappropriate response: "not making trouble for her", and the feelings that arose. I offered a drink of water, tissue, and to stop the interview, but she declined saying: "I need to get this off my chest, to share the burden

with someone else.” The participant mentioned having a ‘sixth sense’ that the child in question needed comfort and reassurance. I reminded the participant of the legal and civic responsibilities of teachers and provided the contact information for the Children’s Authority and the Children’s Hotline. The following day, I called that participant to recommend a recognized psychologist for counseling. At the second interview, I asked about this matter and the participant reported that it was now in the hands of the authorities who had recorded her information anonymously. This participant also reported another case of child abuse, but in that case the then administrator had allowed the teachers to access and activate the child protection agencies, and the case had been dealt with most expeditiously.

One interviewee was emphatic about the lack of safety and security at the ECCE center. This was the only reference made regarding the safety and security of staff and children at a center. Like most government ECCE centers, this one is located in a low-income, government housing project. Over the years, the levels of criminal activity in that community had increased. The participant reported this had impacted the community’s atmosphere, tone, and by extension the ECCE center. Housed in the Community Center which had been refurbished for serving young children, the facility still lacked a security guard, playground equipment, proper drainage, and a nonporous roof. When it rained the center flooded, yet parents continued dropping off their children on rainy days. Thus, teachers had to cope with raising water levels and children, who were bundle in a dry corner.

But more critical than the flooding, is the attitude of a few parents who do not uphold the rules of the ECCE program and renege on responsibilities toward the children. For example, the participant reported one incident when a parent failed to pick up the child at dismissal time. Two hours had passed with the teacher calling the parent's mobile device and leaving messages to collect the child referencing the centers hours of operations. The very angry parent arrived four hours late, verbally abused the teacher and left with the child in tow. Reports were made to the ECCE Division and the administrator; who to date had not yet visited the center to deal with that matter. The child still attends school.

The participant also reported that one week before the interview, in that same community; gunshots, screams, and running shattered the morning's silence. Directly in front of the center, people engaged in a gun fight! Teachers had children lay on the floor - playing a sleeping game, trying to keep them calm - whilst one crawled to the desk, pulled the phone to the floor, called the police, and the Division. When the police arrived, one officer entered the center, spoke with the children and teachers, reinforced what to do when gunshots were heard, took statements from the teachers, and left. Some parents arrived to collect children, but teachers had to remain with other children until parents came after work. Neither the administrator nor officials from the MOE or ECCE Division had visited the center at the time of the interview. These safety and security issues were not mentioned more than once.

Data Aggregation

I continued to manipulate, highlight, arrange and re-arrange, and collapse themes throughout the analysis and reflection processes, and used those themes to illuminate the importance of ECCE practitioners' experiences to professionalism. I found that integrating a compare and contrast approach into data analysis, enabled identification of similarities and differences among participants' responses. The coding methods described earlier enabled interpreting the data and results, and added richness that deepened understanding of practitioners' experiences and professionalism. See the following Table 6.

Table 6

48 Codes Collapsed into Seven Broad Themes

Broad themes	No definition of professionalism – limited descriptors	Practitioners' perceptions of officials views of professionalism	Diverse views of professionalism held by practitioners	Negative impacts	Positive impacts	Similarities and difference between Trinidad and Tobago	Addressing impacts
Sub themes	National Standards	Masculine, technocratic view of professionalism	Warm, nurturing and respectful	Contract employment	GATE funded higher education	Educated at same institution but different salary	Honor national standards and contract terms
	National Curriculum Guide	Relational core of ECCE ignored	Regularity and punctuality on the job	Breach of national standards	Professional and personal development	Both groups are voiceless	Revise official documents to reflect practitioners' voices and research findings
	National School Code of Conduct	Emotional labor not recognized	Strong knowledge base	Remuneration for practitioners	Higher salary	No professional development workshops	One administrator to each ECCE Center
	Official documents need review	Professional knowledge and judgement not valued	Appropriate attire, deportment and conduct	Over-crowding of ECCE Centers	Promotion to administrator	Representation by TTUTA	Lower teacher/child ratios
		No autonomy	Effective communication	High teacher/child ratios	Better skilled	Some have vacation time	Timely repairs and provision of provisions and supplies
		Obedience	Relational, ethic of care	Cluster administration			On-going dialogue with practitioners
		Adhere with fidelity to government mandates	Respectful relationships with families	Center management issues			Payment of owed gratuity
			Ethical conduct	Inappropriate curriculum			Further training for administrators
			Passion and enthusiasm for the job	Over-worked teachers			Intervention for children with special needs
			On-going professional development				Continuous professional development
							Public sensitization of practitioners' roles/functions

Summary

In this section a detailed analysis of the work and lived experiences of 12 early childhood care and education practitioners regarding responses to the impact of government mandates on teacher professionalism in the national ECCE program, practitioner professionalism, and how those impacts could be addressed was presented. Twelve of the study's participants were interviewed once; 11 interviewed twice; 10 attended two focus group meetings, provided four activity plans each, and 11 maintained a journal; with the exception of one in Trinidad who discontinued before the second interview due to an unrelated automobile accident in which she was injured. Another participant from Tobago, was unavoidably out of the country for both focus group meetings but provided information via one interview and the journal. The participants were able to thoughtfully answer all questions on the interview protocol without hesitation. Although participants did not display uneasiness during the interviews, some became emotional when sharing certain information. Data collection concluded with submission of the journals. All participants provided great insight into professionalism by reporting experiences at ECCE centers across Trinidad and Tobago.

Many of the vignettes included in the discussion of each theme and sub-theme relate to the four research questions that drove the study, and are direct quotes from participants' interviews, focus groups, and journals. The following themes/nodes that answered the four research questions emerged from the data: no precise definition of professionalism, but limited descriptors provided; practitioners' perceptions of official views of professionalism; diverse views of professionalism held by practitioners;

negative impacts; positive impacts; similarities and differences between Trinidad and Tobago; and addressing impacts. Themes/nodes emerged at level three of the schematic analysis design – clustering, and from similar patterns illuminated in the data.

Chapter 5 which follows present the study's purpose and implications of the findings organized within the eclectic conceptual framework discussed in Chapter 2. Explanations and rival explanations of the findings from the study grounded in the current research reviewed in Chapter 2 are offered. Chapter 5 ends with recommendations for improving professionalism in Trinidad and Tobago ECCE sector; further research, and implications for social change.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

Amidst and in response to public outcry of inappropriate practices in ECCE, a better understanding of the work experiences of ECCE practitioners in Trinidad and Tobago relating to professionalism, the impacts of government mandates on professionalism in the sector, and how practitioners thought those impacts should be addressed was needed. This provided the impetus for the study. In this explanatory case study, I explored the daily lived experiences of two levels of qualified ECCE practitioners, teachers and assistant teachers, at both government and privately operated ECCE centers in Trinidad and Tobago. The literature reviewed indicated an existing gap regarding this population. ECCE practitioners who worked specifically with 3- to 5-year-old children raised concerns about professionalism and the quality of early education provided to young children in Trinidad and Tobago.

The key findings were that there was: No precise definition of professionalism, but limited descriptors provided by officials; practitioners' perceptions of official views of professionalism were misaligned with the relational core of working with young children and families; practitioners have much broader and diverse views of professionalism than officials; government mandates had more negative than positive impacts; generally professionalism is low in Trinidad, but much lower in Tobago; teachers are overworked and centers are overcrowded; and wide-ranging changes urgently needed.

In Trinidad and Tobago, the national ECCE program is delivered through center-based care. Although some privately owned, group home, care establishments exist, those were not part of the population sampled. I analyzed those experiences via data from a first interview of 12 participants, a second interview of 11 participants, two focus groups with 10 participants, four activity plans from 11 participants, and the journals of 11 participants. One participant withdrew from the study days before the second interview because of injuries sustained in an automobile accident. Another participant did not attend both focus group meetings due to prior engagements on the selected days. Ten participants worked at government ECCE centers, while the other two owned and operated private ECCE/special education centers. This study was guided by the following central research questions and subquestions:

Central Research Question: What does the term *teacher professionalism* as defined in government mandates enshrined in the National Standards and Draft Curriculum Guide mean to early childhood practitioners?

Subquestion 1: In what ways did early childhood practitioners' definitions of professionalism differ from official definitions?

Subquestion 2: In the view of practitioners, how did government mandates impact professionalism and the personal lives of early childhood practitioners?

Subquestion 3: How did early childhood practitioners think those impacts should be addressed?

In this study, I used a qualitative research method with a case study design.

Twelve ECCE practitioners, eight from Trinidad and four from Tobago, who had at least

10 years of service in the national ECCE program at both government and privately operated centers met all eligibility criteria on the invitation to participate in this research and were sampled for this study. Miles and Huberman (1994) pointed out that qualitative studies occurred in real, social worlds and have real consequences in people lives. So those who tell the story must maintain standards worth striving for by capturing the stories participants shared, not just data.

I interviewed practitioners twice in person, using the interview protocol in Appendices A and B, respectively. Both interviews were audiotaped, transcribed, and analyzed for emerging potential themes by hand coding and NVivo software. Participants reviewed verbatim transcripts of the interviews to verify the information collected. Ten participants attended two focus group meetings at which data from interviews were manipulated, clarified, extended, and discussed. See the first focus group protocol in Appendix C. Focus group information was gathered via audio recording and documentation of observations by a paid scribe as well as researcher notes and reflections. Chapter 5 includes an interpretation of the findings, limitations of the study, explanations and rival explanations, recommendations for action and further study, implications for social change, a conclusion, and a reflection.

Interpretation of the Findings

This qualitative case study was based on the conceptual framework relating to early childhood practitioners' views of professionalism in Trinidad and Tobago's ECCE sector, the impacts of government mandates, and how practitioners thought those impacts should be addressed. The framework was based on the theories of Fullan (2007), Senge

(1990), and Nias (1979), which embraced the work experiences of early childhood practitioners, the phenomenon of professionalism, and government mandates in early childhood care and education faced by practitioners in Trinidad and Tobago's changing society. Fullan's change in practice theory referred to the changes that needed to be made across three dimensions of any program if implementation of those changes are to be successful and sustained for achievement of educational goals. The literature supported the need for change in several aspects of early childhood programs, which would improve professionalism therein (Andrew, 2015; Brown et al., 2016; Campbell-Barr et al., 2015; Hordern, 2014, 2016; Moss, 2015; Oberhuemer, 2018; Osgood, 2016; Sims & Pedey, 2015; Taggart, 2016). Those three dimensions are use of new or revised materials, use of new teaching approaches, and alterations of beliefs (Fullan, 2007).

Senge's (1990) systems thinking is made up of four tools that early childhood practitioners needed to actively engage and attain and were found to be important throughout the literature as well as the findings from interviews, focus groups, and journal responses. Those four tools are personal mastery, mental models, building shared vision, and team learning (Senge, 1990). The literature together with data collected from interviews, focus groups, and journals indicated the need for individuals and staff teams to attain and develop each tool named above. This would strengthen systems established within ECCE to support practitioners' professionalism and the provision of high quality ECCE services nationwide (Campbell-Barr, 2016; Cansoy & Parlar, 2017; Holloway & Brass, 2018; Hunkin, 2018; Logan, 2017; Roland, Andreassen, & Ekholm, 2013; Stearns & Margulus, 2012; Tanang & Abu, 2014).

Nias (1979) developed the third theory used in the conceptual framework of this study. The theory of elicitation of voice is evident throughout the study and enacted via interviews, focus groups, and journals. The literature also showed the importance of eliciting teachers' voices about work experiences and lives to understand what really happens in an education system. Evident throughout practitioner work behaviors is that practitioners embraced a professional habitus but needed to improve their own professionalism, to strengthen perceptions of selves, articulation of professionalism, and ability to dialogue with officials and other stakeholders. See the following Tables 7 through 9 that depict the alignment of the conceptual framework of the study with research questions and themes that emerged from the data.

Table 7

Alignment of Fullan's (2007) Change in Practice with Research Questions and Themes

Change in practice	RQ#	Themes from the data
Possible use of new or revised materials	3	Negative impacts Similarities and difference between Trinidad and Tobago
	4	Addressing impacts
Use of new teaching approaches	3	Negative impacts
	4	Addressing impacts
Alterations of beliefs	1	No precise definition of professionalism, but limited descriptors provided
	2	Practitioners' perceptions of officials' views of professionalism Diverse views of professionalism held by practitioners
	3	Negative impacts Positive impacts

Table 7 depicts alignment between the three dimensions of Fullan's (2007) theory of change in practice, the research questions (RQs) guiding the study, and themes that emerged from the data. Generally, participants articulated varied views of professionalism in ECCE and reported that colleagues also held different, conflicting views of the construct that mitigated practices. Those themes illuminated urgent need for dialogue between officials and practitioners for clarification of views and the development of a realistic, ground up definition of professionalism in Trinidad and Tobago's ECCE sector. Rather than believing that negative impacts are troubles to be endured, practitioners should view them as opportunities to demonstrate best practices within the structured, prescribed framework and as avenues for resistance against

developmentally inappropriate demands. Additionally, by showcasing best practices, practitioners can serve as models to colleagues, motivating and altering of beliefs, emulate best practices, access teacher education programs, and thus gradually improve professionalism in the sector.

Table 8

Alignment of Senge's (1990) Systems Thinking with Research Questions and Themes

Systems thinking	RQ#	Themes from the data
Personal mastery	1	No precise definition of professionalism, but limited descriptors provided
	2	Diverse view of professionalism held by practitioners
	3	Negative impacts Positive impacts
	4	Addressing impacts
Mental models	2	Diverse views of professionalism held by practitioners Negative impacts Positive impacts
Building shared vision	3	No precise definition of professionalism, but limited descriptors provided
	1	Practitioners' perceptions of official's views of professionalism
	2	Diverse views of professionalism held by practitioners
	4	Addressing impacts
Team learning	1	No precise definition of professionalism, but limited descriptors provided
	2	Practitioners' perceptions of officials' views of professionalism Diverse views of professionalism held by practitioners
	3	Similarities and differences between Trinidad and Tobago
	4	Negative impacts Positive impacts Addressing impacts

The above Table 8 portrays alignment of the four aspects of Senge's (1990) systems thinking theory, the research questions that drove the study, and the themes that

emerged from the data. Practitioners needed to display personal mastery in ECCE, change how the job was thought of and what was done therein. Building shared vision would happen through regular, open, sustained dialogue between stakeholders, willingness to participate in this was articulated by participants and recommended in the literature (Brock, 2012; Hordern, 2014, 2016; Moloney, 2012; Moss, 2012, 2015; Osgood, 2010; 2012, 2016; Perryman et al., 2017; Simpson, 2012; Tanang & Abu, 2014; Taggart, 2012, 2016; Watson & Michael, 2016). The fourth aspect of systems thinking, team learning reinforced the crucial need for open sustained dialogue between practitioners, officials and other stakeholders so, as a team, all can learn about professionalism in ECCE, the pressing issues therein, develop more appropriate policies and systems, and chart the way forward to improved professionalism in the sector.

Table 9

Alignment of Nias (1989) Elicitation of Voice with Research Questions and Themes

Elicitation of voice	RQ#	Themes from the data
ECCE practitioners' voices	1	No precise definition of professionalism, but limited descriptors provided
	2	Practitioners' perceptions of officials' views of professionalism Diverse views of professionalism held by practitioners
	3	Similarities and differences between Trinidad and Tobago Negative impacts Positive impacts
	4	Addressing impacts

The above Table 9 illuminates how robust elicitation of practitioners' voices according to Nias (1989) enables the gathering of rich, thick descriptions of the daily work habits and experiences of ECCE practitioners in Trinidad and Tobago. Those descriptions facilitated deep understanding of practitioners' views and demonstrations of professionalism, and responses to government mandates for increased professionalism in ECCE. Elicitation of teachers' voice was expressed in the literature that stated to understand what is happening in education, the voices of teachers should be heard (Brock, 2012; Cekaite & Bergnehr, 2018; Chalke, 2013; Cook et al. 2013; Cumming, 2015; Horderns, 2014, 2016; Kim, 2013; Sims, Forrest, Semann, & Slattery, 2015; Skattebol, Adamson, & Woodrow, 2014; Taggart 2012, 2016; Trodd & Dickenson, 2018; Warren, 2013b, 2014)

The complimentary nature of selected theories that formed the study's conceptual framework illuminated several areas of alignment as well as areas not aligned. The fact that no one theory can account for human and experiential diversity was a major consideration when deciding upon the study's conceptual framework. The findings have validated that consideration. Although Fullan's change in practice was the lead theory, all research questions did not align with any one dimension thereof; unlike Senge's systems thinking in which the four research questions aligned with two aspects of same. It seems that Fullan's change in practice may not be as robust as Senge's systems thinking. This may indicate that not much change is needed in practitioners' work habits; but rather, change in the management and operational systems of the national ECCE program is needed, so those become more supportive of practitioners' professional habitus

constructed through collaboration, reflection on practice, meaning making, and continually updating knowledge and skills to enhance ethical practice. Such a change will allow practitioners autonomy to respond appropriately to government mandates given the specific contexts, and specific needs of the children and families served. Similar views were expressed by (Cansoy & Parlar, 2017; Colomer, 2017; Fenech, Sumsion, & Shepherd, 2010; Perryman et al., 2017; Robson & Fumoto, 2009; Simpson, 2010b; Trodd & Dickerson, 2018; Watson & Michael, 2016). Nias's elicitation of voice was the most robust theory of the study's conceptual framework, because ECCE practitioners' voices provided the voluminous, rich data from which the study's findings derived.

In the following sections, the interpretation of findings related to each research question are presented. The conceptual framework, and literature reviewed are discussed in detail. Additionally, recommendations are made to improve ECCE in Trinidad and Tobago.

Research Question 1

Research Question 1 focused on the subtheme that emerged through the interviews, focus groups, and journals. The theme is no precise definition of professionalism, but limited descriptors of the construct are outlined in official documents. The participants emphasized that official documents did not outline what professionalism is or ought to look like in Trinidad and Tobago's ECCE sector. This is the most evident theme emerging from the data, and it is alluded to in the literature which posited the difficulty of arriving at a definition of the term, expressed by researchers: Creasy (2015) and Demirkasimoglu's (2010) statements regarding the problematic nature

of defining professionalism, due to its multidimensional structure. Oberhuemer's (2008; 2018) view that people's subjective experiences, historical, political, social and cultural contexts drove how people defined the term. Simpson's (2010a) belief regarding the dispositions and orientation of professional groups. Karila's (2008) finding that definitions were based upon national regulations and policy decision-making issues, work communities, and individuals. And Dalli's (2008, 2013) view that definitions of professionalism related to critical inquiry about teaching practice. Because the term is dynamic and has many interpretations, it gives rise to different definitions within different functions (Creasy, 2015). However, according to Sachs (2003, 2015) in teacher professionalism the meaning of professionalism changes in response to pressure exerted from the outside, public views and scientific developments; where as Englund (1996 in Demirkasimoglu, 2010) insisted "focusses on the question of what qualifications and acquired capacities, what competence is required for the successful exercise of an occupation" (p. 2048).

Government mandates were handed down to practitioners often via word of mouth, official documentation of some mandates are nonexistent. Participants expressed views that official documents, the national standards, the national curriculum guide and the national school code of conduct that guided the provision of early childhood care and education services in Trinidad and Tobago, failed to provide a definition of professionalism. Upon review, it was found that the standards document and school code of conduct did provide some limited descriptors of professionalism. Most participants articulated understanding and not expecting the national curriculum guide to provide a

definition of professionalism. The participants felt that barring a few typographical errors that document is well laid out but could have been more helpful to improving practitioner planning with inclusion of sample thematic webs, activity plans, projects anticipatory webs, and reports of project conducted at local ECCE centers.

In terms of the national standards document, some participants felt that the document should have provided a definition of or outlined what professionalism in ECCE is about; since it was created by a Cabinet appointed committee mandated to harmonize the operations of all ECCE centers:

The committee's task as directed by Cabinet, was to draft standards for the operations of all schools which regulated the following: registration process; student admission; suitability of physical plant/premises; safety and health of students; record keeping; curriculum and methods of instruction; discipline of staff and students; staffing; and fees. (Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, 2005, p.1)

Appendix IV of that document: Legal Supplement Part B – Vol. 39 No. 159 – 18th August 2000 – 503: Legal Notice No.184 – cited as the Education (Teaching Service Amendment) Regulations, 2000: Part VIII in the Code of Conduct; spoke to teacher conduct, indiscipline, and handling same, but the language therein did not contain the words professional or professionalism. Missing from the national documents were standards for improving and sustaining professionalism.

Of interest to note, is the very detailed section in the school code of conduct, handling of teacher indiscipline – a reactive, colonial – orientation, still vibrant in a post-colonial society. Teachers would not have needed statements of treatments for

indiscipline, if instead clear statements regarding what professionalism should look like in Trinidad and Tobago's education system had been provided; and what teachers should do to develop and demonstrate that professionalism. Officials focused more on correcting indiscipline rather than on guiding professional discipline. Government should have outlined to teachers how professionalism could be developed, improved, and sustained. This would have been a proactive orientation to teacher guidance; provided teachers with clear markers of professionalism needed to be attained and maintained whilst in service. Government officials, therefore, missed the opportunity to craft professionalism commensurate with the country historical, political, societal, and cultural contexts.

The participants felt strongly that the national standards document should have outlined what professionalism in ECCE entailed. This would have provided guidance for practitioners, and benchmarks to be achieved and maintained. The participants shared the view that officials had not thought about ECCE practitioners, creating a robust workforce or the country's educational and cultural contexts. Rather participants felt that government officials created the National Standards (2005) document and national Curriculum Guide (2006) to meet funding criteria of the World Bank, and to protect the government from possible litigation. Some participants also articulated that the national School Code of Conduct (2009) the last document developed, which related to professionalism still is deficit in outlining what professionalism in Trinidad and Tobago's ECCE sector entails and or requires. The participants felt that the document spoke to teacher professionalism in a general sense by inference to the behavior, attire,

responsibilities, interactions, and conduct of a teacher, but it did not reflect inclusion of the early childhood care and education sector workforce; and professionalism in ECCE.

Osgood (2012, 2016) believed that the ECCE community should be engaged in the construction of a view of professionalism that situated practitioners as part of the process rather than accepting an externally imposed, constructed identity. Dalli (2008, 2013) argued that workers in the sector had clear ideas about behaviors, attitudes, and skills that denoted professional behavior valued in the field. This is supportive of and evidenced by practitioners' views of professionalism and what professionalism in ECCE entails. Simpson (2010) suggested an internally constructed or activist approach to professionalism, by considering ideas and the way practitioners owned the conversations surrounding professional standards and qualities be accepted. Practitioner voices therefore, should be reflected in any constructions of professionalism in the ECCE sector. Many ECCE practitioners had not read the national School Code of Conduct (2009) and some had not known of its existence. The document is not one of the official documents given to ECCE centers public or private; thus, practitioners aware of its existence were under the impression that it related only to teachers in primary and secondary schools.

The above relates to Fullan's (2007) change in practice theory and Senge's (1990) systems thinking in terms of the views that: leaders and organizations must clearly articulate all aspects of the vision they want people to buy-into; the future they want them to work towards or build together; provide repeated, clear explanations of each construct within the wider ideology; and engage people in on-going dialogue on anything that arose during the reform process. The above perspectives aligned with participants' views that

the development of professionalism by practitioners would have been aided by ongoing dialogue with government officials, clear benchmarks as a developmental concept of professionalism to work towards; and a clear position statement about what professionalism in Trinidad and Tobago's ECCE sector entails. This would have had the benefits of: One; enabling practitioners to change practice to meet benchmarks; and two, create and establish relevant, transparent, supporting, and monitoring mechanisms therein.

Through the process of developing professionalism, practitioners would have been enabled to speak about classroom practice, engage peers in professional dialogue, share ideas and concerns; and create a community of professionals improving and sustaining professionalism through professional dialogue. Nias' (1979) elicitation of voice is very robust and resonates throughout the study. The exact words of participants are extracted from data collected at interviews, focus groups, and journals to provide rich descriptions and a clearer picture of experiences. Brock (2012) asserted that voice is increasingly used by researchers who wanted to determine educators' thinking. She cited Anning and Edwards (1999), Bennett et al. (1997), Day (1999), Moyles et al. (2002), and Nias (1989) who influenced that research methodology. Prior to the above research, there was a dearth of studies regarding how "teachers' understandings, values, and beliefs informed their planning, teaching methods, provisions, and assessment of play" (Brock, 2012, p. 30). Practitioners developed implicit, eclectic theories based upon varied personal experiences, academic knowledge, beliefs, and values. Since those thoughts are not clearly articulated by practitioners, it is crucial that participants' voices be elicited,

and that practitioners themselves raise the interests and issues, so that elements of professionalism could be established (Brock, 2012).

Change in Practice.

The theory of change in practice is supported with interview, focus group, and journal responses that each practitioner experienced in daily work and personal lives. To implement government mandates practitioners are required to use the new materials provided and when none are provided to revise and adapt old materials to the new teaching approach dictated. Some participants said no explanations of or demonstrations were given on how to use the new materials or approaches, but were severely criticized for materials adapted for use. This resulted in many practitioners not trying to implement the change, and those who tried discontinued efforts. Practitioners are also required to use new teaching approaches not trained for or did not encounter in the early childhood teacher education programs engaged. All participants expressed feeling uncomfortable using the new approaches – Centre Based Active Learning and the Project Approach – because of variance in teacher education programs. Although some participants had encountered the new approaches theoretically, these had not been observed or practiced, during the practicum component of teacher education program in the government system. For some participants, those approaches did not exist in the government system during training. Additionally, participants reported that some administrators were not knowledgeable about the new approaches and could not facilitate or assist in the staff's development.

Lack of knowledge, experience, guidance, and support in implementation coupled with high levels of discomfort experienced daily, hindered alteration of beliefs regarding the importance and benefits of government mandated changes. Conversely, practitioners became more resolute in prior beliefs and practices for preparing young children to gain admission into and become successful at primary school. Consequently, wide variety in implementation of Centre Based Active Learning and the Project Approach exist at government ECCE centers in Trinidad. In Tobago, government mandated curriculum changes and other mandates were not handed-down; therefore, practitioners there did not have similar work experiences like counterparts in Trinidad. Therefore, a change in practice was not attempted by ECCE practitioners in Tobago.

Systems Thinking.

The provision of a definition of professionalism in Trinidad and Tobago's ECCE context would have empowered practitioners to work at attaining each aspect of that definition of professionalism, thus achieving personal mastery in the working with young children. Having achieved personal mastery, practitioners would have attained new mental models about ECCE – new ways of thinking about the crucial roles in the lives of young children. This would have led to: the development of high quality praxis fed by practitioner confidence in the work; and security within the professional community to dialogue about concerns and challenges in ECCE; with a view to finding solutions or strategies embedded in the ethical codes of conduct. Through such ethical, professional dialogue practitioner teams would have: engaged the process of building shared vision of what ECCE means; what professionalism means and how it looks; worked more

consistently at attaining the professionalism enshrined in official documents; and would have supported and enabled each other to improve professionalism.

Team learning would have resulted from those endeavors and would have had the additional benefit of increasing collegiality, team spirit, and professionalism in ECCE. Such professional engagement is supported and encouraged in the literature by Van Keulen (2010) who posited that professionals should not learn alone but through team interactions within the entire organization, and in collaboration with other stakeholders. Such collective team learning occurred within professional and critical learning communities in which transformation of professional practice took place via reflection. In such critical learning communities, all stories would have been elicited and told; through individual stories, everyone produced a different version of the same story (Urban, 2007, 2015). Through reflective dialogue, the critical learning community would have attained its objective of advancing social change, social justice, and democratic values in ECCE that would have improved teacher professionalism (Cansoy & Parlar, 2017; Perryman et al., 2017; Trodd & Dickerson, 2018; Van Keulen, 2010; Watson & Michael, 2016).

Through such a process, practitioners would have been empowered to gradually address systemic issues and offered government officials context specific solutions to remediation. This would also have led to the creation of new policies in ECCE from the ground up – as recommended by Osgood (2012, 2016; Millei, Gobby, & Gallagher, 2017) and other researchers in the literature (Brown, Lan, & Jeong, 2015; Everiss, Hill, & Meade, 2017; Fenech, Giugni, & Brown, 2012; Islam, 2010; Lloyd, 2015; Lyons, 2011; McGillivray, 2010, 2012; Moloney, 2010, 2012; Moore, Almeida, & Barnes, 2018; Moss,

2012, 2015) to strengthen ECCE provisions and services nationwide. The marriage of the three theories underpinning this study's conceptual framework would have occurred naturally had the processes described above been undertaken. In the literature reviewed, Fenech, Sumsion, and Shepherd (2010) and Taggart (2012, 2016) found early childhood teachers constituted a professional habitus, by continually constructing knowledge and skills through collaboration, critical reflection, and meaning making with a focus on ethical practice and social justice (Colmer, 2017; Costello & Costello, 2016; Henderson, 2014; Monk & Phillipson, 2017; Peterson et al., 2016; Sisson & Iverson, 2014; Solvason, 2017). Participants expressed the following:

Sky Blue

As a teacher, I research the topic or theme chosen by the children each term, create a thematic web and then a curriculum web. Then with my colleagues, start acquiring resources for curriculum delivery, thinking about and planning the experiences and activities to engage children. This does not happen at some centers.

Green

Every day, I arrive at my center one hour before the official start. I wipe all surfaces with sanitation solution, select and lay out the materials I will need for activities, check over my plans, ensure I have observation forms ready for documenting children I observe. I am prepared for my children's arrival.

Gold

I receive each child in my care from their parents. I greet each child with a hug, do a quick head to toe examination. I ask the parents about each child's night, breakfast,

and the journey to school, allow parents to assist children in packing away their personal belongings, then, they walk the child into the classroom.

Black

I do not wait for the government to provide teaching resources for my center. I make what I can from recyclable and indigenous materials, and purchase what I can afford. I ensure that each child has a complete set of resources so he/she can be successful at the planned activity.

Royal Blue

Contrary to demands from the Unit – I allow the children to free choose the learning center they want to work at, I do not limit the children’s choices because Center Based Active Learning is about children initiating their own learning based on their interests – we are asked to have only two learning centers per day available for children’s use.

Purple

I hug and comfort crying children, I allow children to take turns sitting on my lap or next to me during story reading. I am reprimanded for this, but I know the importance of calming children in distress – so I do it anyway.

Those work habits are markedly different from the regulatory mandates that tightly prescribe what practitioners do and what ECCE should look like (Albin-Clark et al., 2018; Grey, 2011; Harwood & Tukonic, 2016; Hedlin, Alberg, & Johansson, 2018; O’Neil & Bourke, 2010; Peeters, 2010; Ozturk, 2010; Warren, 2014; Zembylas, 2014). Latta and Kim (2010) encouraged facilitating educators’ ongoing contact with peers, and

communication about the particulars of the classrooms. Putting practitioners in continuing dialogue with each other enables experiencing the importance of dialogue to learners and learning for themselves (Cansoy & Parlar, 2017; Colmer, 2017; Tanang & Abu, 2014; Trodd & Dickerson, 2018; Watson & Michael, 2016).

Research Question 2

Research question 2 focused on eight sub-themes that emerged from interviews, focus groups, and journals. Those aggregated into two broad themes: One, practitioners' perceptions of official views of professionalism, and two, diverse views of professionalism held by practitioners. In the absence of a definition of professionalism in official documents regulating the provision of ECCE services; participants felt that government missed the opportunity to guide professionalism, create a robust ECCE workforce, and that the official documents are an ill-conceived rush for funding. Through discussion at the focus group the subtheme participants' perceptions of official views of professionalism' emerged. Participants said the following:

Green:

Government officials think of us as mindless women who need to be directed and supervised, if things are to go well in ECCE. But, rigorous, hash supervision has the opposite effect. It had led to cruel, disrespectful treatment of practitioners, resulting in resistance at ECCE centers – overt and covert. Government does not value our professional education, experience, and judgment.

Royal Blue:

I am not convinced that officials thought about ECCE teachers when crafting the official documents. They needed to show the World Bank that they met all funding criteria, so did as was required with little thought of how those policies would impact the people in ECCE.

Gold:

Professionalism was not the focus of our official documents. I think the mentality of people writing the document was archaic - a slave driver mentality. They were preparing documents to reform a program, but did not use a developmental, visionary lens. It was not about helping us – the workers; it was about protecting the government.

Purple:

Even when the government engaged national consultation on those documents – it was just a charade – doing what was required by the World Bank. Our recommendations were not reflected in the White Paper. For example, we unanimously asked that the 1 to 10 teacher/child ratio be kept, but that was removed and increased to 1 to 15.

Black:

Regardless of what we say, government officials will do what is politically expedient. This had been the trend over successive governments. They call us to meetings, ask us to voice concerns, we do so, but no change happens – our concerns are not addressed.

Yellow:

My concern is about the persons advising the minister of education – what are the individuals' terms of reference regarding ECCE? Clearly those advisors do not know the

reality of ECCE classrooms. I do not think they know what ECCE entails. Their expectations of us are so unreasonable, inappropriate, and inhumane. Imagine the new policy is to remove all standing fans from ECCE centers, because teachers at one ECCE center were negligent in supervision – one child’s fingers got damaged in a fan! That should never have happened. Rather than disciplining the errant practitioners, they punish all children and teachers – some six thousand plus innocent, conscientious persons. Those buildings are not as well ventilated as the Standards recommend, they are ‘sweat boxes’; they become very hot and humid during the day. But, what do government officials care; their children do not attend public ECCE centers.

Green:

The ‘government’ which enabled our education and training, treat us like untrained, mindless persons. Our professional knowledge and judgment is not considered or valued. We are not allowed to apply same, everything is dictated to us and we must do what is expected even when we know it is detrimental to the children we serve, or it does not meet their individual and group needs. Failure to do as directed brings harsh reprisals.

Sky Blue:

I think the government views professionalism as being obedient – doing all that is expected of us – just doing what we are told. It is not about applying our professional knowledge and best practices. It’s about following dictates. Like the past minister of education said on national television “if ECCE teachers are professionals they will do what is required of them”.

Gold:

The government's method of getting us to comply with their unreasonable demands is to threaten our jobs – threaten us with negative appraisals and none renewal of contracts. So at government ECCE Centers, we – many teachers - are intimidated into doing what we know is not developmentally appropriate for the young children we serve.

Official views of professionalism, articulated by the minister of education as reported by participants, aligned with a technocratic, masculinists' orientation spoken to by Hevey (2010). It is obedient oriented; but, practitioner function according to a different model of professionalism – a relational, contextual, developmental model. A managerial/technical model that prescribes standards and outcomes; and sees practitioners as technicians, trained in right answers and not as professionals trained to reflect and question; is diametrically opposed to how practitioners work and function in the ECCE sector. The official language in those documents is disempowering of ECCE practitioners and perpetuates views of practitioners as inapt and incompetent (Costello & Costello, 2016; Henderson, 2014; Moore & Clarke, 2016; Monk & Phillipson, 2017; Sparapani & Perez, 2015). Duhn (2010) warned of the effects of neoliberal educational reform and that the push towards managerial performativity as professionalism would lead to a deprofessionalization of early childhood teachers (Clausen, 2015; Cumming, Sumsion, & Wong, 2015; Brown, Holloway, & Brass, 2018; Weber & Yoon, 2016; Lewis & West, 2017; Millei, Gobby, & Gallagher, 2017) But those warnings were not heeded.

Change in Practice.

Fullan (2007) advocated for reform policies use of worker centered language especially when the people who were to implement new policies were not involved in policy development. That strategy would have minimized the ‘us - them’ divide expressed by practitioners; presented designated implementers in a knowledgeable, positive light; would have generated greater ‘buy in’; and ultimately higher levels of implementation. Although there would have been some resistance given the new dispensation, practitioners would have been more inclined to work at implementation; been more receptive to the reform agenda; and would have sought knowledge and assistance for so doing. But, the official mandates placed practitioners on the defensive. The language therein was offensive and devaluing of the specialized education, beliefs and values, years of experience in ECCE, and the relational core of working with young children and families. Dalli (2008) contended that “official conceptions of professionalism in early childhood tended to express what was expected of practitioners rather than express their professional reality” (p. 183).

Fullan (2007) recommended that workers be involved at every step in the reform process, from the initial planning stages through to evaluation of implementation and the results. Failure to do so, according to Fullan led to the formation and veracity of dynamic pockets of resistance very appealing and attractive to the undecided; in terms of having a united voice, support, and strength in numbers. Conversely, had practitioners’ ideas about the proposed reform, views on what is happening in ECCE classrooms been solicited, and had practitioner representatives been actively involved throughout the process; those representatives would have been the agents of change and reform lobbyists, who would

have mobilized support for and driven implementation of new policies. However, those practitioner representatives would have had to be trained in the new approaches, and recommendations regarding the modifications, resources, and support required would have had to be responded to with positive urgency. Additionally, the implementation plan needed a phased approach starting with a pilot project headed by those trained practitioner representatives. The pilot would have had a dual purpose inclusive of: formative evaluation, which would have illuminated difficulties with the reform and its implementation, thus enabling context specific modifications for enhanced implementation, success, and sustainability.

Systems Thinking.

In terms of Senge's (1994, 2003) beliefs regarding systems thinking, the study's results point to a dearth of ideas for developing and sustaining organizational learning and growth in planning the ECCE sector reform. In the rush to meet funding criteria, policymakers and government officials sacrificed visionary, succession planning, failed to engage practitioners' views and sufficient research, and integrate findings into the reform plan. Moioi (2010) found that meaningful connections and meaningful interactions were the foundations of systems thinking – collegial relationships are about interdependence. This is about sharing thoughts that meant, these are our thoughts as a body that is a culmination of team work (Colmer, 2017; Henderson, 2014; Tanang & Abu, 2014; Trodd & Dickerson, 2016; Watson & Michael, 2016). In fact, what happened in the attempted reform of Trinidad and Tobago's ECCE sector, mirrors what the literature said should not be done, if any reform agenda is to be successful and sustained.

According to Senge (1996) a systems effort meant everyone examines the assumptions that underpinned practices, by engaging in reflection. Thinking about the work enables teachers to: diagnose errors; refine ideas and reflect for clarification; endure task and engage in self-analysis that facilitate making corrections where necessary – thus evaluating professional actions. Dialogue is a strong element of systems thinking. Senge emphasized that all staff, especially the principal should listen to criticism from different areas and view these as opportunities for growth. The principal, leader, administrator should clarify roles, responsibilities, and differences in order to derive mutual understanding among staff members. The facilitation of dialogue is a discipline that requires respect and humility. Moioi (2010) cited Chattelly (1995) who noted that dialogue encouraged regenerative thinking and generative listening and openness to the many possibilities that encouraged creativity.

Whether the government's intension was to continue planning to integrate and institutionalize monitoring, supporting, and evaluating mechanisms within the implementation phase after funding was secured is not known. Suffice to say, this may never be know. But, the government's failure to plan from an informed position, seriously compromised implementation and led to the current intenuous situation in ECCE. Nationally, the ECCE sector is steeped in disillusionment, industrial action, and chronic apathy. ECCE practitioners contracted as nonteaching staff have secured union representation to address concerns and disparities in the system. In the view of practitioners, 11 years after government's declaration of national ECCE reform, the ECCE sector is in a worse position than prereform days. The benefits or outcomes

attained to date have not justified the millions of dollars invested or matched expected outcomes. The laudable, worthy ECCE reform objectives of 2005 have not been achieved. According to the participants:

Royal Blue:

“We have been set back some 20 plus years. Things are worse than when I entered the service. My optimism has waned based on my experiences and our ECCE reality”.

Sky Blue:

“Will we be able to pull ECCE back from the brink of total collapse? I pray that we can, maybe this study is what we need to stave off its collapse”.

Purple:

If someone had said to me in 2005 when the national consultations were being conducted, that four years short of ‘Vision 2020’, our ECCE sector would be in its current state of disarray, I would have taken up arms in defense of the then government’s intension and vision. Something must be done urgently.

Green:

“Trinidad and Tobago need help to right the ECCE sector! So many things have gone wrong, its mind bogging. Something positive must be done quickly”.

Gold:

“Currently, the ECCE sector is on a slippery slope. We are sliding with increasing speed towards a dark abyss. I shudder to think of what may happen; the future looks bleak. I am depressed about the situation”.

Red:

“Everyone in ECCE has a lot work to do if we want ECCE to reclaim the past days of glory, of hype, of positivity, of national will to bring about better days for young children and their families”.

Yellow:

“There is too much variance, disparity in program delivery within and across government ECCE centers nationwide. Practitioners at government ECCE centers do not seem to know what they are doing”.

Lilac:

“Things have been bad, low teacher morale and so on, but now with the THA in charge, things will improve – we are feeling better about the future for ECCE in Tobago”.

Orange:

“I think we were doing alright, but changes will come for the better. We can only go forward with the THA. Things will get better”.

Pink:

“The feeling in ECCE is that things are bad – we are in trouble – The teachers are demotivated, parents in most cases, are not supportive or active in programs, and more important, the children are underserved”.

These views are supported in the literature which evidenced that early childhood teachers were demotivated by the fast pace of mandates and unrealistic job demands

(Bradbury, 2012; Bloechliger & Bauer, 2016; Hordern, 2014, 2016; Kim, 2013; Osgood 2012, 2016; Taggart, 2012, 2016; Thomas 2012; Warren, 2013a, 2014). Some felt that new policies, if followed lowered quality (Brock, 2012; Perryman et al., 2017; Phelan, 2010; Tyler, 2011; Urban, 2012, 2015); and is a dis-service to young children (Chalke, 2013; Clark, 2012; Cook et al., 2013; Einarsdottir et al., 2014; Lewis & West, 2017; Taggart, 2016). New policy initiatives delineate particular concepts of children that impacted significantly on the teachers (Hordern, 2014, 2016; Kim, 2013; Lyons, 2011; Millei & Gallagher, 2017; Moloney, 2010b; Moore & Clarke, 2016); forcing teachers to continually revise professional roles to meet competing demands and expectations (Ang, 2014; Bankovic, 2014; Bradbury, 2012; Chalke, 2013; Harwood & Tukonic, 2016; Kim, 2013; Moloney, 2010a; Monk & Phillipson, 2017).

Elicitation of Voice.

The beliefs of Fullan (2007) and Senge (1994, 2003) share a common thread with Nias's (1974) elicitation of voice. The theories recommend ongoing professional dialogue between officials, leaders, policymakers, workers, and designated implementers. The above named theorists share the perspective that through continuous dialogue, shared ideas, collaboration, and consensus; change in practice, systemic change, and reform in education are possible. Those theorists posited that teachers - the delivers of education - should always be at the forefront of and actively involved in the discussions, plans, implementations, and evaluations of reforms in education. Teachers are the stalwarts on whose shoulders the implementation burden fall, and consequently, the persons blamed for reform failure. According to Kim (2013) the majority of teachers in early childhood

are women, women teachers do not have opportunities to discover professional needs and identities through research; consequently, teachers' voices are ignored. The high compatibility and complementarity of the theories - change in practice, systems thinking, and elicitation of voice; coupled with the fact that the voices of ECCE teachers in Trinidad and Tobago had not yet been elicited, provides ample justification for the conceptual framework that guided this study and spun the tapestry woven throughout.

Research Question 3

Research question 3 focused on 24 subthemes that emerged from interviews, focus groups, and journals that collapsed into three broad themes: negative impacts; positive impacts; similarities and differences between Trinidad and Tobago. Research question 3 generated the most data. This was the focal point for participants because it provided opportunity to vent and articulate long suppressed feelings, share experiences, and to destress. Participants felt strongly that government mandates had more negative impacts with only a few positive impacts. This is corroborated by other researchers in the literature reviewed who spoke of many negative impacts of government mandates on workers in early childhood (Bloechliger & Bauer, 2016; Osgood, 2010, 2012, 2016; Simpson, 2010; Taggart, 2012, 2016; Maloney, 2010; Moss, 2014, 2015; Phelan, 2010; Sisson & Iverson, 2014; Skattebol, Adamson, & Woodrow, 2016).

For example, Osgood (2012, 2016) posited that, how ECCE practitioners were constructed in government policy as deficit rendered them invisible as persons, but practitioners are the ones held responsible for failed government policy. The persistent deficit ECCE worker discourse in government mandates diverted attention from the

structural disadvantages associated with working in the sector. Skattebol, Adamson, and Woodrow (2016) reported that regulations were a ‘double-edged sword’, one edge conferred legitimacy, and the other restricted and limited the capacity of ECCE practitioners to practice core knowledge and wisdom. According to Phelan (2010) the introduction of licensed teacher schemes via qualifications, creation of prescriptive, outcomes-based curricula and systems of accountability are key strategies in the deprofessionalization of teachers. Moloney (2010a) reported that a range of initiatives directed at improving quality and increasing professionalism had resulted in more expectations of ECCE teachers; professional role made more complex, and teachers were subjected to significant accountability pressure from external agencies.

Simpson (2010b) reported that government’s professionalization of the early year’s sector, improved teacher status and position; but it also reduced professional autonomy and enforced new accountability and performance targets not previously associated with early years’ work. Taggart (2012, 2016) opined that the call to professional status was a double-edged sword often synonymous with selfsacrifice and burnout rather than job satisfaction. Early childhood teachers are expected to shoulder the moral burden on behalf of society, yet little value is placed on the relational aspects of the work.

Change in Practice.

Although reforms in education generally had some negative impacts, the level of negativity resulting from the reform in the Trinidad and Tobago’s ECCE context is astronomical. The government’s failure to enact the reform agenda from a theory driven

perspective could be credited with: minimal stakeholder buy in; failed national implementation; and the sector's current status. According to Micklethwait and Wooldridge (1996) cited by Fullan (2007) "the State is an incredibly blunt instrument, it gets hold of one overarching idea and imposes it without any sensitivity to local context. [And there] is the desperate craving of politicians for a magical solution" (p. 294). Fullan continued by stating "it will be a wise and courageous politician who declares that capacity building is more important than accountability" (p.235), and reiterated that only small scale, nonlasting improvements can occur if the system is not helping. He argued that complex nonlinear elements in dynamic systems could be understood and acted upon if people at all levels (of those systems) worked on building learning organizations.

Participants in the study thought:

Royal Blue:

Even when we are called to workshops/meetings, no one listens to us, they do not consider what we say important, the support, resources, help we need to do our jobs better do not arrive, as far as they are concerned, we cannot contribute to building up the ECCE sector.

Green:

"The administrators and people at the Division do not consider what we say, it is not important to them, they do not think we should be included in planning for developing ECCE in the country".

Gold:

We have so much to offer our country, we are committed to developing ECCE nationwide, but the government does not see us in that light. To them we are mindless, unintelligent technicians, who must be told what to do.

Green:

“We are not involved in anything, we go to work, do our jobs as best we can. We try speaking about making things better, but no one listens or involves us in planning”.

Sky Blue:

Officials seem to have a divide and conquer policy, they are uncomfortable when we get together – that’s one reason they stopped workshops and meetings. But if we do not work together things will not get better; ECCE will not develop, things will get worse.

Yellow:

At private ECCE centers there is better togetherness than at government centers. We have team spirit and collaboration. Administrators and teachers at the government Centers seem to be always in disagreement, there is no togetherness.

Systems Thinking.

The above aligned with Senge’s (1994) premises for systems thinking. To enact systems thinking and as a consequence build learning organizations, government should have based the future of ECCE on accomplishing trilevel reform across the sector through capacity building. This meant synchronizing what happened at three levels of: the school and community, the educational district – as the midpoint, and the national or State level, striving to establish permeable connectivity. This permeable interconnection

would have been sustained via consistent, two way interaction and mutual, bidirectional influence within and across the three levels (Fullan, 2007). This should have been the focus of the government mandated ECCE reform in Trinidad and Tobago. But traditionally governments wanted: quick fixes to urgent problems, and focused on adoption rather than implementation. Governments forget that: the time line for implementation is longer than the next election (Micklethwait & Wooldridge, 1996 in Fullan 2007).

Managing change in any single setting is difficult and became enormously, increasingly more complex on a national scale because of the numerous agencies, levels, and thousands of people involved. Additionally, managing change in an education system became infinitely more difficult for government if its personnel did not go out to ECCE centers to understand the culture and problems of local early childhood practitioners (Fullan, 2007). Governments are potentially major forces for transformation and large-scale reform but need to consider and proactively address the implications of mandate and actions to attain greater improvement across all or most ECCE centers. The problematic issues with the reform in Trinidad and Tobago's ECCE sector are: what the government did, and what the government failed to do to make a positive difference in ECCE.

Negative Impacts.

Participants unanimously stated that government mandates had more negative than positive impacts. Generally, participants felt overburdened with paperwork, had less time to work with children, did not understand new initiatives, and had to frequently implement new policies, curricula or teaching strategies. Support for participants' views is provided by Sparapani and Perez (2015), Murphy (2015), Peterson et al., (2016), and Brown and Weber (2016) who reported teachers feeling overtaken and misplaced by the fast pace of change, increased administrative demands, expectations of implementing new curriculum, reduced time to spend with children, and centralized requirements not relevant to the Centers. The authors continued by citing a number of teacher concerns which contributed to job dissatisfaction that arose from increasing levels of accountability in that regulatory environment. Those concerns included excessive paperwork, loss of autonomy, over-regulation, inadequate minimum standards, and the ambiguous nature of some regulatory stipulations, which led to differences in interpretation and consequently tension between practitioners and administrators.

This compared very favorably with what participants said, for example:

Green:

“I do all her paperwork – write monthly reports on the center, prepare monthly financial statements, plan termly thematic webs in addition to teaching a group of 20 three-year olds”.

Purple:

“I write up all center reports, do all curriculum planning, manage the center in the administrator's absence, and still have a group of children to teach”.

Royal Blue:

“I chose to write the center’s monthly reports and all other documents regarding our center’s management, because a mess was being made which was casting our center in a bad light”.

Gold:

“I am an assistant teacher with responsibility for center management when the administrator is absent. My workload is tremendous. I also have children with special needs in my group of 15 children”.

Sky Blue:

‘All curriculum planning, community and parent networking, and supervision of junior staff are my daily responsibility, but I am not the centers’ administrator – only the teacher”.

Black:

The children are my priority! I should not have to perform all the administrator’s duties; that of a security guard, and also teach children. So, I focus on the children, but the paperwork piles up and eventually I am burdened with it.

Royal Blue:

“We are qualified - have degrees, there is a curriculum guide, yet they dictate what we should teach our children – this is not right. I am very upset by this demand”.

Gold:

We are not allowed to plan themes and activities together with the children – we can only engage – work with the administrator’s ideas. When she is absent, I ask my children what they are interested in and work on the ideas they offer.

Sky Blue:

We are in breach of many minimum standards – lighting and ventilation, number of working toilets per children, number of children per teacher, outdoor play space, and developmentally appropriate materials and resources.

Government mandated initiatives focused on accountability rather than capacity building and therefore, did more harm than good. The mandates placed tremendous pressure on local system and practitioners, and provided little support, help or incentives. Government mandates increased teachers’ workload (Brown, Lan, & Jeong, 2015; Moss, 2010, 2014, 2015; Osgood, 2010, 2012, 2016; Tyler, 2012). The overload and fragmentation of efforts occurred at all levels, as agencies at one level tried to influence those at the next level down, through authoritative directions and reactive compliance. The above fragmented vertical relationship collided with major horizontal disconnections caused by many government entities that failed to coordinate work to the detriment of mandated initiatives (Fullan, 2007). This resulted in a conundrum of haphazard, contemptuous treatment of practitioners, to which many responded contumaciously.

Participants voiced a lack of autonomy; not being allowed to practice the core, knowledge, and engage best practice; of curriculum being directed and prescribed; of being handed a thematic web each term that was developed by someone not attached to the work context. Participants’ views had been articulated earlier by Hilferty (2008) as a

major drawback of ECCE reform in Britain. The author reported earlier research that illuminated how the tradition of teacher professionalism as autonomy in curriculum delivery was challenged by the introduction of a national curriculum; through which the professional autonomy of teachers was sacrificed to demands by the state to control curriculum. The new professionalism - official and regulatory discourse – emphasized public accountability of performance and individual responsibility of teachers to accept the radically changed conditions of work. Hilferty (2008) opined that such utility redefined professionalism as occupational control by the state.

Creasy (2015) and Demirkasimoglu (2010) positioned autonomy as a major component of professionalism because it entails an individual's decision making to achieve goals and controlling the situation related to the work. The author cited Friedman (1999) who posited that autonomy functioned as a buffer against pressures on teachers and also strengthened teachers personally and professionally. This view was reiterated by Johnson (1978) and Bull (1988) statements in Demirkasimoglu that autonomy has the opposite function of organizational control. Campbell-Barr, Georgeson, and Varga (2015), Taggart (2016), and Urban (2008, 2010, 2015) argued that the prevailing conceptualization of the early childhood professional was constructed from a hierarchical mode based upon producing and applying expert knowledge not necessarily appropriate to professional practice in ECCE, because it contradicted the relational core of working with young children.

Participants in Trinidad expressed views that officials wanted teachers to work in a distal mode from the children. Some administrators frowned upon close teacher/child

attachments and physical contact like: allowing children to sit on teacher's lap during story reading; and cuddling or hugging crying children. Some berated participants and claimed that practitioners: spoiled the children and that was the reason children from particular teachers had difficulty settling down with other teachers. Participants said:

Purple:

When new children start school, they cry because of separation anxiety, so we cuddle and hug them and offer what comfort we can. But my administrator is very opposed to this. I am consistently criticized for so doing. She rather I let the children cry, saying they would stop at some time.

Green:

I am accused of babying the children. I pamper them too much – I do not understand how she expects me to not comfort a child in distress. This goes against all my ECCE learning, my nature, and my personality.

Royal Blue:

They have taken the heart out of early childhood care and education, ask for the care – left to officials that would be nonexistent. Fortunately, for the children we – early childhood educators – really love working with young children, we have heart, we care, we relate and comfort – it is a labor of love.

According to Senge (2003) ECCE practitioners' dilemma is the perception of reality as pressure to be borne, crises to be responded to, and limitations to be accepted. How could practitioners be made to see the reality as a medium for creating a vision of

what the future should be - not as a limitation? Senge (2006) advocates helping people see problems in terms of the underlying systemic structures and mental models rather than singular events. This Senge thought fostered appreciation of the forces that shaped reality, realization that people are part of those forces, and could affect change. Even though systems thinking developed those capabilities, it took time, patience, and required leaders who were committed to helping teachers become learners and develop new skills and knowledge.

This was a major failing of the systems created to facilitate the ECCE sector. In the first instance, the selection of administrators is flawed in terms of screening for persons for suitability. Administrators are selected based on qualifications and years of experience in ECCE. Participants' reported some administrators had no background in ECCE, and came from the primary school sector. This indicate that the ECCE Division needs to reconsider its recruitment and selection processes. The inclusion of rigorous screening and investigation of persons' backgrounds are implicated; in conjunction with professional development and education in ECCE program administration, human resource management, supervision, and professional development of center staff with a capacity building focus.

Another issue that plagues the ECCE sector is the caliber of staff at the ECCE Division, and the fact that the staff is not trained to administer the new program or reform agenda. Very few persons at the ECCE division are trained in early childhood education or program administration. The majority of staff are civil servants assigned to a government agency or entity, not specialists with the core knowledge required to make

informed decisions for the good of the ECCE sector. Those persons are also partial advisors to the minister of education. This reality is compounded by the 2010 change in government, and the new government's recruitment of party personnel into key positions at the MOE and ECCE Division. Those persons advanced the new government's agenda of changing the work started by predecessors. Participants reported several changes – as breaches - in the national standards that resulted in the negative impacts on professionalism at ECCE Centers.

According to participants:

“The new government just changed things – like the teacher/child ratio from 1 to 15 maximum - to being the minimum. At my center each group has 20 children”.

They just stopped delivering school supplies. Before the change in government at the end of every term we took inventory upon which supplies were ordered for our center. Now, we do not get supplies every term, only once for the academic year. Those supplies do not stretch to two terms.

They just decided to change the number of children each centre should serve. Each building has a particular floor space which was used to calculate its pupil intake in alignment with the space per child standard. But the new minister of education said we are to take in more children. My center had to take in 10 more children – we are overcrowded – a definite hazard!

How do they expect us to work in poor conditions – two children's toilets not working, the water pump is non-functional so water does not come into the center. They

removed all standing fans from the centers and the ceiling fans had long stopped working – they are not repaired.

We are not to ask parents for donations of cleaning and toilet supplies. Does the new government expect us the teachers to supply those items for the center? I cannot use my small take home pay at the center, I've got a family to provide for.”

Why did the new government come up with ‘cluster administration’ of ECCE centers? Some administrators have difficulty managing one ECCE center, yet they are given clusters of ECCE centers to manage? They are passing their administrative work onto us, teachers and assistant teachers.

Suddenly and without warning, we were told by our administrator that the MOE demands that all fund raising be stopped immediately. We could no longer raise funds to augment the centers’ finances and purchase supplies expended. What do they expect us to do?

When I have to do the administrator’s work or when she calls demanding that I write a center report which she will collect in the afternoon. I must stop working with my group of children, who are absorbed by other already crowded groups – this is a dis-service to the children. This happens often and if one teacher is absent – the situation is worse.

Positive Impacts.

Most participants stated that government mandates resulted in a few benefits in terms of higher education, earning a first degree free, and a second degree funded in part by the government. This was corroborated by other researchers in the literature reviewed who spoke about positive impacts of government mandates reported by early educators (Benette, 2009; Karila, 2010; Oberhemeur, 2010, 2018; Thomas, 2012). Most participants expressed gratitude for the GATE program, the improved education, salary, and job status. Some participants spoke about personal benefits in terms of being better able to provide for families, owning a home and car, being more knowledgeable, confident, and outspoken. Similar views were expressed by early years' practitioners in Lloyd and Hallet (2010) who reported that practitioners recognized the national agenda of raising workforce's status and quality via higher qualifications that would raise the quality of provisions and increase outcomes for children. Another benefit reported by Lloyd and Hallet was of a personal nature, practitioners felt valued within the workforce and gained qualifications with related pay and conditions. They felt confident, empowered, proud, passionate, and respected.

Some participants are appreciative of the new buildings that house early childhood programs. The participants reminisced about the early years working in cramped, hot, dark, and unsanitary settings; sharing space in community centers, and the tedious daily chore of building up classrooms in the morning and packing away in the afternoons. Participants mentioned the benefits of having the national standards document and the national curriculum guide in terms of outlining what practitioners did, and the protection derived from national standards. Similar sentiments had been

expressed by Miller's (2008) in citation of Fenech and Sumsion (2007) findings from early years' teachers who said: "if something goes wrong, we're protected in a way, if we follow standards and regulations then we're protected" (p. 261). Some participants spoke of the controlling nature of standards; of practitioners having little leeway. Standards, therefore, were both enabling and restricting (Miller, 2008, 2013; Osgood, 2010, 2012, 2016; Moloney 2010a). Generally, participants welcomed the standards document and curriculum guide, because of the opportunities for professional development and recognition not previously offered. All participants agreed that both documents are in urgent need of revision and improvement to be more helpful to practitioners.

Similarities and Differences between ECCE in Trinidad and Tobago.

Participants on each island – Trinidad and Tobago - spoke about similarities and differences between the ECCE sectors on the islands. Some examples of those differences are: One, only six new state of the art ECCE centers were built in Tobago in 2005, compared to 165 built to date in Trinidad. Two, building of new centers in Tobago did not continue; whilst in Trinidad that continued to current times. Three, ECCE centers in Tobago were small, build to accommodate at most 30 children, whereas centers in Trinidad were of different sizes based on the community and catchment areas intended to serve. In Trinidad, some centers were built to accommodate in excess of 80 children, others can accommodate 50 or more children, and some others can house 30 children. Four, participants spoke empathetically about the difference in salaries paid to practitioners in Trinidad – who received higher salaries - in contrast, practitioners in Tobago received lower salaries. These views coincided with the findings of Cumming

(2015), Everiss, Hill, and Meade (2017), and Moore, Almeida, and Barnes (2018) whose participants mentioned concerns about: lack of recognition of the new status and role, lack of career prospects, lack of parity with teachers, and scant improvement in pay and work conditions after acquiring professional status.

Five, participants mentioned that ECCE centers in Trinidad were clustered and had one administrator assigned per cluster, however in Tobago there was a principal or head teacher at each center. Six, in Tobago, practitioners experience a dearth of school resources and teaching supplies, in contrast to Trinidad, where practitioners received school and teaching supplies every term until 2013. Seven, practitioners in Trinidad were engaged in professional development workshops during vacation periods, but practitioners in Tobago were not. Eight, practitioners in Tobago were on holidays when schools were closed at the end of each academic term, but counterparts in Trinidad were required to be at the center and attended workshops. Nine, practitioners in Trinidad received a salary increase upon completion of the degree in early childhood, but, practitioners in Tobago did not receive a salary increase commensurate with new qualifications. Ten, ECCE centers in Tobago were managed by a School Board composed of community members, teachers, and parents. The School Board had power to hire and fire workers, raise funds, and repair buildings. All School Boards reported to the ECCE Division in Trinidad.

Examples of similarities in Trinidad's and Tobago's ECCE sectors are: One, practitioners earned first degrees from the same tertiary institution, some earned the same quality pass (first class and second-class honors) and graduated in the same cohort. Two,

every ECCE center received copies of the national standards and draft curriculum guide. Three, the salaries of all ECCE practitioners' both in Trinidad and Tobago are paid by the central government. Four, ECCE practitioners in Trinidad and in Tobago are seeking union representation to negotiate salary increases, payment of outstanding gratuity, improved work conditions, and other concerns with the government. Five, practitioners on both islands shared common attributes, feelings, and dispositions such as: an epic of care in the work; invested emotional labor in ECCE; belief in the capabilities of young children; are committed to young children's optimal development; valued the right of each child to quality early education and all other rights; believe in early intervention for children with special needs; the inclusion of all children in the national ECCE program; and partnership with parents for the greater good of the children served.

Globally, differences and similarities in ECCE sectors across and within countries were presented in the literature. For example, Chalke (2013), Hordern (2014, 2016) and Simpson (2010a) in England, and Moloney (2010a) in Ireland found that highly trained practitioners were lost in the ECEC sector, did not enjoy the same status and pay like primary school colleagues; and additionally, did not have the same status and salaries as peers in England. This relates directly to participants' reports of disparities in salaries for practitioners in Trinidad who are paid more than counterparts in Tobago, although the practitioners have the same qualifications and years of service in the sector. Additionally, ECCE teachers in both Trinidad and Tobago do not enjoy the same professional status and pay like primary school colleagues.

Harwood, Klopper, Osanyin, and Vanderlee (2012) reported commonalities across Canada and South Africa in terms of early childhood educators' experiences and ideas across contexts; and an ethic of care that both groups of educators thought inherent in professionalism. Common to both Trinidad and Tobago ECCE sectors is the ethic of care practitioners think crucial to working with young children and inherent in professionalism. Early childhood practitioners in Trinidad and Tobago viewed new entrants in the field of early childhood who did not demonstrate that ethic of care as not professional and not suitable for working with young children.

Similarities and differences were also noted within districts like Victoria, Armidale, New South Wales, and Melbourne in Australia's ECCE sector as reported by (Cook et al., 2013; Sims, Forrest, Semann, & Slattery, 2015; Skattebol, Adamson, & Woodrow, 2016). Those researchers found work conditions, pay, and implementation of standards varied according to type of program offered, structural characteristics of programs, teachers' training, and personal qualities. Similarly, within and across Trinidad and Tobago work conditions, pay and implementation of standards varied according to the type of program, in terms of privately owned and operated ECCE centers tended to be better managed, repairs and maintenance done in a more-timely fashion, but teachers are paid lower salaries than the government ECCE centers. Conversely, government ECCE centers tended to be poorly managed, in a state of constant disrepair, maintenance was not scheduled in a timely manner, and although salaries therein were higher than the private sector, wide disparities in salary exists. Some standards were implemented in Trinidad; however, Tobago was untouched by those implementation demands. For

example, the increase pupil intake, the increase in teacher/child ratios, the discontinuation of providing school supplies which happened in Trinidad, but not in Tobago.

In New Zealand, Clarke (2012) and Warren (2013b, 2014) reported similarities and differences in ECE found in Aotearoa and Nelson in terms of implementing Te Whariki – the early childhood curriculum framework. Those teachers shaped teacher identities by either changing or holding on to valued subjectivities; although teachers are ‘governed by qualification and registration requirements, if they wished to claim the credibility and title of teacher (Warrens, 2013a). In creating those identities, ECE teachers in both Aotearoa and Nelson, New Zealand at professional best, displayed through job performance, a deep and passionate commitment to working with young children. Under pressure and challenges exerted by changing policies, it is essential that teachers maintain that passion which learning and teaching requires (Warrens, 2013a, 2013b).

The same is true for Trinidad and Tobago. Differences and similarities are found in how ECCE teachers in Trinidad implemented the national curriculum guide. For example, wide variance exists in implementation of Center Based Active Learning and the Project Approach at government ECCE centers. Participants reported receiving a thematic web planned by someone in the cluster and having to implement that theme regardless of its congruence with the children experiences or community context. In Tobago, participants reported not using the national curriculum guide because of a lack of understanding of how to apply its principles in classrooms and no professional development workshops in its use were provided. Consequently, in Tobago, ECCE

teachers continued using a dated skills based curriculum called SPICES that they had acquired during training at certificate level many years ago.

Research Question 4

Research question 4 focused on the 12 subtheme that emerged from interviews, focus groups, and journals. Those subthemes aggregated into one broad theme - addressing impacts. Collectively the participants said that government could address and minimize the negative impacts of mandates if steps are taken to: One, engage ECCE practitioners in continuous dialogue with officials. Two, make practitioners' employment in early childhood permanent. Four, honor standards, policies, and contract terms. Five, lower the teacher/child ratios. Six, appoint one administrator to each ECCE center. Seven, re-train/re-educate administrators. Eight, maintain buildings, provide supplies every term. Nine provide early intervention for young children with special needs. Ten provide continuous professional development for practitioners. Eleven sensitize the national community about the role and functions of ECCE practitioners.

Regarding suggestion two, make practitioner employment in ECCE permanent, through to suggestion six, the literature evidenced similar issues across the world. For example, in England: issues of workforce inclusion in terms of status – which was not on par with qualified teachers – and salary – which was lower than teachers, still did not have national agreement; and of professional recognition among colleagues and employers being non-existent (Everiss, Hill, & Meade, 2017). Moore, Almeida, and Barne (2018) and Lewis and West (2017) suggested that policies intended to increase the workforce were dangerous if not accompanied by systems to address entrenched

marginalization of early childhood teachers. Marginalization of those teachers is evident in the lower salaries, poorer working conditions, and lower professional status than primary, secondary teaching counterparts. Those researchers continued by stating that those pay and status differentiations continued despite the intensive regulatory settings in which practitioners worked, and the myriad of legal, statutory, and other requirements conformed to.

Conversely, Phelan (2010) cautioned about the results of teaching being bound by recognition, highlighting a difficulty related to the limits of identity, because human beings typically exceed or frustrated prior identifications, and often contradicted deepest commitments when they encountered others. Oberhuemer (2010) reported that countries like Norway, Belgium, Ireland, and Germany were “promoting the professionalization of ECEC staff, moving towards ECEC systems which integrated care and education, and improved quality, equity, and system efficiency, but implementing those goals in their economic climate remained a challenge” (p. 62). Oberhuemer (2010) cited Moss (2006, 2008) who consistently criticized structural injustices in the ECCE workforce makeup; others highlighted the effects the regulatory gaze (Osgood, 2009, 2012), had on practitioners’ understanding of professionalism (Ortlipp, Arthur, & Woodrow, 2011); and called for research-driven workforce reforms in countries where those structural discrepancies are pronounced (Moss, 2008, 2014, 2015; Target, 2012) aimed at addressing those gaps (Oberhuemer, Schreyer, & Neuman, 2010).

Participants’ unanimous pleas for lowering the child/teacher ratios, placing one administrator at each ECCE center, reducing over crowding, and regular provision of

teaching resources and supplies at ECCE centers was supported in the literature by Bloechliger and Bauer (2016) who found that aspects of staffing in terms of insufficient staffing and inadequate numbers of floaters, contributed to robust perceptions of overwhelming job demands. This also outweighed the effects of another structural element like job resources, which were also lacking. Thus, official regulations required specific child-to-teacher ratios at all center-based institutions, but in actuality these ratios were higher because of abrupt changes in policy, coupled with high absenteeism and job vacancies. There was a strong link between a lower teacher/child ratio and, teacher professionalism, the program quality, working conditions of ECCE teachers, health outcomes, and turnover.

In the view of participants, if corrective measures are taken, there would gradually be reduced tension at ECCE centers; reduced workload for practitioners, and reduced overload of systems; enable practitioners to focus on working with young children and families; thus, increase professionalism in the sector. Additionally, the following would be improved: staff morale; administrator/staff/stakeholder relationships and interactions; program delivery, effectiveness, young children's outcomes and achievement; parent/stakeholder involvement; practitioner development and professionalism; and generate community support and involvement at ECCE centers. Participants also articulated the advantages of appointing one administrator to one ECCE center. The participants felt strongly that the administrator/teacher as leader – curriculum and personnel – would be enabled to: know and understand the staff, needs and values; the center's culture; the community and its needs; and plan ongoing, appropriate, needs based

professional development and programs, in collaboration with staff and other stakeholders. Participants articulated that those actions would result in the creation and sustainability of professional learning communities within centers, which would enhance the professional development of all, and ultimately improve professionalism therein.

However, when teams or meetings are mandated by government and top down methodologies are used to push the agenda or purpose of those meetings, those became the antithesis of authentic learning communities (Dickson & Mitchell, 2010). Leithwood (2010) opined that under those conditions, learning communities did not produce the expected transformation of instructional practices and improved student learning. The above equated to Trinidad and Tobago's current ECCE experience in terms of, ECCE practitioners being called to workshops – during vacation periods and sometimes after work hours – at which topics are presented and practitioners told what to do. Hardy (2010) maintained that this top down approach requires practitioners to come out of classrooms after school hours, out of schools, to workshops at which specific instructional strategies or programs introduced and expected to be implemented in classrooms.

Thus, workshop content was based upon perceived systemic needs or best practice determined by district-level administrators and staff. Bruce, Esmond, Ross, Dookie, and Beatty (2010) contended that these methods were ineffective since: One, did not honor teachers as professionals; two, took teachers out of professional environments; three, assumed that outside experts knew best what professional learning teachers needed; and four, did not give teachers autonomy over and ownership of learning. Bruce and Ross

(2009) and Mitchell and Sackney (2009) attested that this type of learning left teachers feeling silenced and powerless, had a negative impact on professional efficacy which was counterproductive to improving student achievement. Mitchell and Sackney (2009) advocated a change towards building learning communities to support professional development.

According to Ebbeck, Chan, and Yim (2011) the designated mentor teacher – the administrator - did have a leadership role to play, one of which was providing resources and support to effect change. Other roles were planning and creating a climate, then implementing and supporting change, but this was a significant and challenging task for the leader (Ebbeck & Chan, 2011; Fullan, 2007). Creating a climate in which practitioners learned from each other within and across centers, and that focused on turning expert knowledge into action or practice was vital. Turning information into actionable knowledge is a social process, through which a learning culture is facilitated and develops; an element crucial to change in education (Fullan, 2007). To develop a learning culture, Fullan et al. (2005) recommended: providing examples of successful change made by practitioners in classrooms; visiting other centers and discussing with staff specific practitioner originated change and what led to it; and providing in-service seminars/conferences where teachers present classroom practice to colleagues.

Some participants suggested that staff exchange programs between high performing ECCE centers in Trinidad and Tobago be facilitated by the Division. The participant viewed this as an avenue for enhancing professionalism in ECCE. Such methods are advantageous in that: participants are then enabled to identify with peers and

would begin to feel more confident; staff teams would be encouraged to become interested in collaborating on change initiatives of interest and perceived as needed. This team approach would assist in the smooth implementation of all phases of the change process. For positive outcomes to be achieved, those changes must be viewed by practitioners as relevant, beneficial, and significant to all parties. Ebbeck, Chan, and Yim (2011) recommended focusing on producing teachers who were agents of educational/social change, and improvement and developing lifelong learning dispositions among staff and students.

The Annenberg Institute for School Reform (AISR) supported and encouraged the use of professional learning communities (PLCs) as a major component of effective professional development efforts. The institute believes that PLCs have potential to improve the professional culture in school districts. Research findings have confirmed that raising academic achievement is enabled by improved instructional capacities in classrooms. The AISR (2004) cited research findings by Senge (1990) and Knapp (2003) that the type of professional development that improved instructional capacity contained the following elements, those were: ongoing; embedded within the context specific needs of a particular setting; aligned with reform initiatives; and grounded in a collaborative, inquiry based approach to learning. Professional development, therefore, must be driven by the needs and interests of participants themselves, and enable adult learners to expand on content knowledge and practices that are directly connected with working with students in classrooms (Corcoran, 1993; Darling-Hammond & Mclaughlin, 1995; Little, 1988; Elmore, 2002; in AISR, 2004).

Professional learning communities provide natural spaces for continuous professional dialogue that is a key criterion in the development and sustainability of professionalism. Stroll, Bolan, McMahon, Wallis, and Thomas (2006) summarized definitions of professional leaning communities as “groups of people sharing and crucially interrogating their practice in a continuous, reflective, collaborative, inclusive, learning-oriented, growth-promoting way” (p. 223). Darling-Hammond and Richardson (2009) included a focus on student learning related to teacher learning. Stroll et al. stated “the key purpose of professional learning communities’ work is to enhance teacher effectiveness as professionals, for students’ ultimate benefit” (p. 229). Those definitions emphasized that learning communities should not only bring professionals together; but should engage educators at all levels of the system, in collaborative work which critiqued and refined educational practices to enhance students’ experiences and improve achievement.

The above goal aligned professional learning communities to the impact of collaborative inquiry on student achievement. Marzano, Waters, and McNulty (2005) opined that since robust correlation between teaching practices and student achievement have been evidenced; educators should continually build capacity to match teaching strategies to students’ learning profiles. Individually, teachers are expected to possess instructional knowledge, skills, and abilities to ensure each student’s success (Marzano et al. 2005). At schools, collective capacity develops when communities of teachers attain a shared sense of effective teaching and learning, and an ethic of collaborative inquiry (Mitsell & Sackney, 2011). At district level, capacity building enhances the “complex of

structures, management systems, and support mechanisms that contribute to goal attainment” (Lee, cited in Bruce et al, 2010. p. 1). Thus, a learning community functions in three domains: One, individual – where people increase professional competencies; two, interpersonal – where shared understandings and purpose are the fruits of collaborative critique; and three, organizational – where educators come together and supply the resources that facilitated collaborative work.

The perspectives of both Senge (2003) and Fullan (2007) support participants’ views in terms of Senge’s belief that people need leaders who are committed to the development of systems thinking, and who understand the dilemma to be faced when helping people develop new skills. Those persons ideally, should be the administrators who would stay the course; maintain and consistently articulate the vision; and explain that vision of the future to practitioners. Through this process, practitioner capacity building and systems thinking will occur. But, to become truly effective leaders, administrators should have the power to hold the vision when looking deeply and honestly at the current reality and supporting practitioners’ movements towards the desired future.

Administrators need to focus on what needs to be done, the larger operating system, and the people with whom the future is being created. The above could be fostered by developing a learning organization, which according to Senge (2000) means involving everyone in the system and enabling: expression of aspirations; building awareness; developing capacities together; recognizing common stake in the future of the school system; and learning from each other. Development of ECCE centers as learning

organizations begins with the establishment and sustainability of professional learning communities within each ECCE center.

Sky Blue suggested that the government should identify the high performing ECCE centers, at which some of the mandates are successfully implemented, and use those centers as models for others to follow. Practitioners from other centers could go on observation visits, bring back to base centers and try out the new insights and strategies observed. Pink suggested that an exchange program could be arranged between centers, teachers from other centers could work at model centers for one term then return to base communities. Pink advanced the need for such an exchange program between Trinidad and Tobago ECCE centers. Fullan (2007) recommended “finding examples where a setting has been deliberately transformed from a previous state to a new one that represented clear improvement and knowing about the causes and dynamics of how the change occurred” (p.117). This would aid replication of transformation and improvement across other settings.

The above is embedded in the principles of Nias’s (1974) elicitation of voice and literature which purported that practitioners’ voices had been absent from debates about what professional behavior and practice in early childhood entails (Brock, 2012; Osgood, 2010; Moss, 2010, 2014; Target, 2011). Participants in this study articulated how through dialogue and collaboration between officials and themselves, the negative impact of mandates could be successfully addressed; the reform agenda could be salvaged; official documents and policies could be revised and amended; and successful implementation of ECCE reforms could begin at all centers. These perspectives are at the core of and

formed the rationale for elicitation of voice piloted by Nias and utilized by other researchers (Brock, 2006, 2012; Hordern, 2016; Islam, 2010; Karila, 2008; Moloney, 2010; Moyles, 2010; Murphy, 2015; Simpson, 2010b; Taggart, 2016) who have called for its use in education and evidenced its benefits.

Limitations of the Study

The limitations of this study are, among other things, the choice of a small sample of practitioners in Trinidad and Tobago. The results indicated earlier cannot be generalized to the entire Trinidad and Tobago ECCE sector, public and private. The findings are related to the experiences of practitioners at some government ECCE centers and two privately owned and operated ECCE centers. Only those settings and others in specific cluster under the supervision of particular administrators share similar interactional experiences and work conditions. However, other government ECCE centers were similarly impacted by the government's nonprovision of resources, discontinued professional development, center repair and building maintenance, overcrowding, high teacher/child ratios, disparities in practitioners' salaries; and lack of dialogue between practitioners and officials.

Other data that could have assisted in more fully answering the research questions would have been the experiences of administrators, and more teachers from private ECCE centers if included in the study. An ethnographic study could have yielded richer data because the researcher would have investigated selected practitioners more in depth, staying closer to the phenomenon under study for long observations, thus would have collected more detailed field notes.

Another limitation existed in terms of data specifically related to Trinidad and data to Tobago. For example, participants in Tobago are unanimous in views of being ignored by the authorities in Trinidad; there is no ECCE Division in Tobago to oversee ECCE matters; practitioners in Tobago did not receive professional development programs, resources, and supplies as colleagues in Trinidad did; and there is wide disparity in practitioners' salaries between Trinidad and Tobago. Practitioners in Tobago who earned a first degree became the principals or head teachers at ECCE centers, yet did not receive salaries commensurate with that elevated status.

ECCE centers in Tobago did not have administrators and are managed by a School Board composed of community members. No government ECCE center in Trinidad is managed by a School Board. Centre management is conducted by the ECCE Division through the administrators. School Boards in Tobago are able to implement schedules of fundraising ventures to augment the centers' finances. Additionally, centers in Tobago tend to be better managed in terms of repairs to buildings. School Boards meet regularly and are very accessible to staff who report monthly.

The government of Trinidad and Tobago was changed in September 2015, and as of October 2016, the THA assumed authority for early childhood care and education on the island. The People's National Movement (PNM) government was the crafters of earlier reforms initiative - Vision 2020 - relevant policies, and official documents; those were drastically changed by the People Partnership (UNC) government when elected to office in 2010. The political machinery, agenda, and landscape are largely responsible for the status of ECCE on both islands. This study is limited in terms of its inability to

investigate and discuss in greater depth the implications and full impact of the change in governments and political agenda from which mandates are derived, on practitioners' professionalism in Trinidad and Tobago's ECCE sector.

The new UNC government of 2010 sought to eradicate ECCE practitioner autonomy in curriculum delivery by changing existing policies. That government favored a more academically rigorous and prescriptive curriculum. Therefore, the previous social/emotional childcentered, centerbased active learning curriculum enshrined in the Draft National Curriculum Guide (2006) was changed. This was rationalized as a basis for improving students' overall performance at the SEA administered to all students at the end of primary level schooling. The then government felt it needed to control what ECCE practitioners did, and the content delivered to young children, by mandating each term, administrators plan the thematic content for ECCE centers under supervision.

The government, therefore, engaged in a new professionalism; occupational control of early childhood practitioners; as expressed by the then minister of education on national television, "if early childhood teachers are professionals; they will do what is required of them". This was spoken to by participants and in the literature by Osgood (2010, 2012, 2016) who opined that government officials demanded strict obedience from early years' workers based upon accountability and performance measures. Whereas, Moyles (2010a) regarded officials' technocratic view of early childhood teachers' work as devaluing and disempowering, Moloney (2010b) felt that those reform initiatives are control mechanisms that did not position early childhood teachers as professionals.

The new government was oriented towards economizing education, a process that ensured economic interest is maximized in educational content and process which required redefinition of practitioners' and children's knowledge. However, that process contained neoliberal philosophical elements that dominate ECCE policy formation. "Neoliberalism assumes that market forces are efficient means of creating conditions for: consumer freedom, allocation of scarce resources, and generating diversification thus providing the flexibility required by the changing world order" (Furlong et al. 2000, p.10). Under neoliberalism, education is a subsector of economy, so by providing the necessary resources - human and capital – the country could compete internationally, with education the leading sector of the knowledge economy (Peters, 2000). The new government's commitment to neoliberalism and new market agenda provided a framework for the changes in education emphasized by cost-efficiency, accountability, and performativity, which was introduced into the reforming ECCE sector. According to Sachs (2003) this created a "set of paradoxes about the nature of teaching as a profession" (p.123), including how to redefine teacher professionalism in new and positive ways even when evidence indicated that teachers' work had intensified, and teachers are being deskilled.

Conversely, despite the fact that the PNM had outlined a vision for the development of Trinidad and Tobago, focused on human capital development, to be attained via a seamless education system; this national administration had neither fully completed planning nor institutionalized inherent reform agenda, policies and systems in education, and specifically in the ECCE sector. That government had also not secured

majority consensus and buy-in from the general population regarding what the people needed to do to further that vision. Insufficient national dialogue on what Vision 2020 entailed and its implications for the people had been conducted. The national community was still ignorant about the meaning and implications of the new dispensation. Calling a snap election in mid 2010 was another grave mistake by the PNM; and losing that election left the country open to a new political agenda, ideology, expediency, and change in its developmental path, to the detriment of our youngest citizens. This is evidenced by our current historical, societal, economical, educational situation, and the study's findings.

The dissonance continued with the new UNC government of 2010, who having won the election; did not seem to have a plan to govern the country. New government officials set about attempting to wipe clean the slate by discontinuing all projects and initiatives started by the last government. The UNC attempted to erase what had been started; demanding drastic, ill-informed changes without seeking to understand the original intension, its rationale, and how those tied into and were critical for continued national development. With heavy strokes of the pen and loud orations, work in ECCE changed overnight. Practitioners are devalued, overworked, maltreated, and underpaid. The tools for working in ECCE no longer provisioned. Some practitioners resorted to using limited take home pay to purchase teaching materials and supplies. Others relied upon parents who support children's early education and understand the importance of assisting the centers. Practitioners' decisions are based on the epic of care that underpin working with young children and families.

In Trinidad and Tobago, the prevailing hegemonic discourse and policy reforms focused on measurability, accountability, and technical competence minimized attention from, and denied space for the subjectivity of working in ECCE settings to unfold. ECCE practitioners struggle to satisfy government mandates and at the same time engage with children, families, and colleagues in ways that demonstrate professional confidence, expertise, and authenticity. The practitioners struggled to develop a culturally appropriate form of professionalism related to working with young children in Trinidad and Tobago. A professionalism from within, according to Osgood (2012, 2016), is shaped by life history, gendered, raced, and classed subjectivities. Osgood (2010) opined where “space was made for life experiences and wisdom to play out in professional subjectivities, opportunities for deeper-level appreciation for the work and ultimately professionalism develops” (p. 130). In light of this, it can be said that the government, hindered ECCE practitioners’ development of professionalism by the kind of work climate and experiences that developed at ECCE centers, as a result of the unrealistic mandates.

The government and owners of private ECCE establishments stress employees’ qualifications, training, and publicize staff as professionals when marketing the business. Yet, these employers diminished the importance of qualification, training, skill, and practitioner autonomy in industrial recognition of staff as professionals. In Trinidad and Tobago, the government exercises occupational control of practitioners through changed policies and mandates. The language used mistook error for truth that practitioners need to be directed and told what to do; so that young children could achieve the new outcomes government outlined in mandates. It therefore, is not in the government’s

interest to advance the status and labor of ECCE practitioners; notwithstanding social and economic policy, labor market, and community responsibilities demanded of those workers. These interests are major hindrances to ECCE practitioners earning professional recognition and status. This study argues that ECCE practitioners should be encouraged to determine and manipulate work product at ECCE centers, relevant to context and the needs of clients, rather than external forces making those determinations. This would result in professionalization of the ECCE sector from within, facilitate greater motivation to implement government mandates, and ‘buy in’ of the reform across the sector.

Brock (2006) cited Blenkin et al (2004) declaration that since professional status was threatened by changing policy contexts, early years’ practitioners should become more conscious of what professionalism in ECCE entailed. The author continued by quoting Egan’s (2003) assertion that professionalism of early years’ educators is qualitatively different from that of other teachers; and Oliveira-Formosinho (2001) who stated that whereas early years’ educators shared a common purpose, standards, and ethics in the work, professionalism is difficult to define because some are at different stages in training and qualifications. Therefore, a crucial component to attempts at defining professionalism in early childhood care and education in today’s climate should be to elicit the voices of ECCE practitioners.

Recommendations

Trinidad and Tobago’s early childhood sector is based upon five of the seven essential principles of highly effective programs advocated by Neuman (2009); in that it: actively targets the neediest children, begins early in a child’s life, emphasizes

coordinated services, focuses on improving academic achievement via high quality instruction, instruction delivered by trained professionals. However, this study found that the following two essential principles are ignored: acknowledging that intensity – depth, consistency – matters; and holding selves accountable for results. This study also found that emphasis on coordinated services waned because of the former two deficits. Therefore, more research into Trinidad and Tobago’s ECCE sector in terms of: systems and structures’ effectiveness, curriculum implementation; children achievements, parental and community involvement and partnership, policy development and implementation, and teacher continued professional development are indicated.

Based on this study’s findings and to advance ECCE practitioner professionalism, the national program and system effectiveness and efficiency in Trinidad and Tobago’s ECCE sector, the following recommendations are made:

1. Government must increase its investment in ECCE. An urgent requirement of at least, a 25% increase in financial allocation from the national fiscal budget is indicated to operationalize the changes recommended by this study’s findings. According to Cleary and Ensler (2010) the benefits of increased investment in ECCE are evidenced, far outweigh, and justify such expenditure. The authors intimated that investing in early childhood education is not only an economic imperative; it is the right thing to do, because the next generation of workers and leaders are being prepared. Cleary and Ensler continued by saying ECCE programs are developing members of society who would be competent at establishing meaningful relationships; demonstrate

respect for communities and are proficient at managing any challenges along any chosen paths. Additionally, from the interim ECCE programs instill in children the academic and social skills, attitudes, and dispositions necessary for successful adult lives. Research had shown that having experienced positive, high-quality early education, children enter elementary school ready to read, grow in scientific and analytic capabilities, and continued being healthy, participatory community members. This emphasized an earlier call by Kamau and Sabatini (1997) of UNICEF, who cited Articles 18:2 and 18:3 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child that provided clear direction to governments and society to make ECCE a national priority. International research have consistently shown that: low salaries, poor working conditions, heavy workloads, lack of time to fulfill multiple responsibilities, onerous administrative duties, and low professional status have led to burn-out, staff turnover, and job dissatisfaction amongst ECCE practitioners (Bloechliger & Bauer, 2016; Boyd & Schneider, 1997; Brown, Weber, & Yoon, 2016; Brown, Lan & Jeong, 2015; Cumming, 2016; Hayden, 1997; Lazzari, 2014; Lyons, 1997; Warrilow et al., 2002; Whitbrook & Sakai, 2003; Fenech, Waniganayake, & Fleet, 2009). Those researchers called for Federal government to designate substantial funds to addressing those industrial issues. The authors intimated that failure to do so would result in continued marginalization of ECCE practitioners, and the intended benefits of improve qualifications to improve program quality policy would be thwarted.

2. Review and amend three official documents: The National Standards for Regulating Early Childhood Services (2005); The National Curriculum Guide (2006); and the National School Code of Conduct (2009). Revision and amendment reflect: the changing dynamics in ECCE; practitioners' voices; this study's findings; and current international research in the early childhood field and educational reform. Additionally, thereafter, establish a cyclical schedule for review of those documents with a caveat that amendments be informed by the findings of local research into the Trinidad and Tobago ECCE sector, and not solely upon political expediency or agenda. The reviewed standards document should: reflect practitioners' voices and this study's findings; prioritize and enforce low child-to-teacher ratios of 1-10; modified language to conceptualize professionalism in ECCE upon practitioners' articulations inclusive of: core knowledge base, strong positive, work ethics of care and relationships, application of professional, context-specific judgement; revise work conditions that fosters professionalism; and e-organization of ECCE centers for continuous improvements and resourcing (Brock, 2012; Hordern, 2014, 2016; Maloney 2010; Moss, 2008, 2014; Osgood, 2012, 2016; Peeters, 2010; Simpson 2010b; Taggart, 2012, 2016; Urban, 2009, 2015; Woodrow, 2008). Those researchers called for reflection of practitioners' voices in policies and discourses on professionalism in ECCE.

3. Restructure the ECCE Division to include the following specialized departments: quality assurance inclusive of assessment and evaluation; curriculum development and implementation; human resource management and professional development; special education needs and services; centre provisions and maintenance; and parent and community outreach. Suitable and qualified staff employed for each department. Those persons would work under the direction and supervision of an experienced departmental head who would report to and liaise with the Director of the ECCE Division. This requires that ECCE subunits at each educational district office be manned by one person from each department named above, with responsibility for all ECCE centers in that educational district. Additionally, the operating systems should be strengthened and restructured to a cyclical academic term-based approach to enhance monitoring and provisioning (Senge 1997, 2006; Fullan 2007, 2008).
4. The ECCE Division should develop and institutionalize flexible systems that enable the establishment of professional learning communities within ECCE centers, informed by current research findings and theories on educational change, inclusive of systems to evaluate, support, and monitor each planned element. The goal of learning organizations is not engaging reactive activity each time new demands of schools, curriculum, and practices are made; but being ahead of the change. ECCE centers should be empowered to develop the philosophy of learning organizations that viewed learning as a way of

working, similar to a way of living (Silins, Zarins, & Mulford, 2002). Those researchers suggest that the difficulty of change for schools as organizations is the problem of sustaining momentum. The authors cited Stroll and Fink (1996) who suggested schools become learning organizations at which the rate of learning within the school equaled to or is greater than, the rate of change in the external environment. Other reasons to support schools as learning organizations are that schools: become organizations with a sense of direction; focused on current reality through scanning the contexts; planned effectively, efficiently, and flexibly; and organizations at which continuous development and improvement are essential components of the culture (Fullan, 2007).

5. Another way of improving teacher quality and bringing about change, is encouraging practitioner inquiry research. Changes in government policy require teachers to rethink approaches to learning and teaching. Beyond teacher education and training, teachers could engage in practitioner inquiry research to upgrade selves and teaching. Teachers would identify challenging issues and with support via mentorship work on strategies for changing and improving practice. Through research teachers have opportunities to develop as professionals, affirm, validate, and improve practice; and deepen and improve teaching relationships both with children and peers as professionals (Ebbeck, Chang, & Yim, 2011). Practitioner research is a tool for advancing knowledge and stimulating change in attitudes, values, and practices which

are all essential to driving and sustaining progress and professionalism in the early childhood sector (Fenech & Lotz, 2018; Solvason, 2017).

6. The government of Trinidad and Tobago could learn from and adapt for possible implementation via an initial pilot project, Fullan's (2009) report on factors that enable successful reform in top ranking countries. For example, Hargreaves et al. (2007), and Hargreaves and Shirley (2010) cited in Fullan's report that Finland's success was based upon: a high-quality teaching profession, supportive working conditions, professional trust, and an inspiring country vision. This requires combination of national vision, government steering and support with professional involvement and public engagement for promoting learning and results. Another example was the Ontario story – results without rancor – Levin et al. (2008, cited in Fullan, 2009), found that the success was based on three sustained elements: respect for staff and for professional knowledge, comprehensiveness, and coherence; and alignment through partnership between government and sector – schools and districts. Government should heed the advice of Fullan (2009) by considering the McKinsey Report that examined characteristics of top performing systems globally. The report identified four factors or policies and strategies amenable to manipulation that accounted for high performance: One, attracting high quality people to the teaching profession – academics as well as suitability for teaching. Two, focusing on and strategies for developing quality instructional practice on an on-going basis on the job. Three. cultivating, selecting, and

developing instructionally oriented leaders – principals/administrators and others at district and State level. And four, continuing data based attention to how well individual students, schools, and sets of schools are doing with early intervention to address problems (Barber & Mourshed, 2007, in Fullan, 2009).

7. Another avenue to be explored by government is that of emotionality, which refers to the emotional labor undertaken by ECCE practitioners when working with young children and families. This emotionality informs conceptions of the professionalism that is needed and valued at ECCE centers (Taggart, 2012, 2016). Working with young children is as morally serious as other caring professions like nursing and social work. Therefore, the caring element in ECCE together with skills and competence need to be central to how professionalism in the sector is conceived of and articulated. To ignore or go beyond caring testifies to an ancient, colonial equation between caring and females as irrational and antiintellectual. Skattebol, Adamson, and Woodrow (2016) showed that practitioners' own language of care opposed dominant ways of thinking about quality and professionalism in ECCE. Practitioners used words like empathy, love, support, collaboration, and care, caring mother experiences to engage good practice. This is a feature of grassroots professionalism that involves fostering skills and maintaining close working relationships with children and families in low-income communities. Practitioners in Trinidad and Tobago's ECCE sector described needing to be caring, compassionate, nonjudgmental, going beyond the job responsibilities

and mandates to work with children and families. Some officials and administrators frown upon those warm nurturing relationships and interactions. According Dahlberg and Moss (2005) ignoring practitioner caring embodied a hegemonic, legalistic approach embedded in current reform agenda, policy language, and directives that is disaligned with the relational core of working in the ECCE sector (Cekaite & Bergnehr, 2018; Einarsdottir et al., 2014; Luff & Kanyal, 2015; Van Laere & Vandenbroeck, 2016; Zembylas, 2014).

8. Plan in collaboration with tertiary institutions, the development of graduate programs for administrators specifically geared towards ECCE program administration and management; human resource management; curriculum development and implementation; and ethics and laws regarding serving young children and their families. Three caveats indicated therein are: One, reintroduction of screening processes for applicants short listed to fill the positions of administrators and teachers at ECCE centers, thus ensuring that selected personnel possess suitable qualities and characteristics for working in the ECCE sector. Two, at the end of each academic term, ECCE center staff teams engage in peer assessment, dialogue, and context related problem solving exercises with the view to enhancing collegiality, improving program effectiveness, and synergy between all aspects of the program. Three, establish and maintain partnerships with community stakeholders and engage them in annual evaluations of the center's management, ECCE program

delivery, and community outreach. The results of those tiered evaluations should be used to inform the support, resources, and changes required at center level, and how those could be provisioned.

9. ECCE practitioners in Trinidad and Tobago should form a professional association, a ‘National Association for Early Childhood Care and Education’ (NAECCE). Professional associations have been recognized by the international community as a major catalyst which guided professions through change (Greenwood, Suddaby, & Hinings, 2002; in Hordern, 2014, 2016); adapting professional roles to fit changing requirements, and shaping, legitimating and revitalizing professional knowledge base (Karseth & Nerland, 2007; in Hordern, 2014, 2016). In addition, that body advocates for policy forums for the profession. Hordern (2014, 2016) cited Millerson’s (1964) determination of the primary functions of qualifying associations as: One, to organize; two, to qualify; three, to further study of the subject and communicate information; four, to register competent professionals; and five, to promote and preserve a high standard of professional conduct. Indicated in primary function three, the crucial role of the professional association in re-contextualizing knowledge for practice, on the grounds that professional knowledge is a source of solutions to emerging problems. Millerson cautioned that the association should not have unilateral control of the knowledge base; because that could hamper continual scrutiny, improvement, and revision best engaged when higher education institutions and practitioners are involved.

However, I acknowledge the myriad challenges inherent in establishing, managing and sustaining a professional association. Hordern (2014, 2016) reported that certain ECCE systems, those highly privatized and fragmented in nature (like Trinidad and Tobago's ECCE sector) made professional associations difficult and attainment of its primary functions problematic. The thousands of ECCE practitioners, working in enormously ranging settings, with varied qualifications would make finding common ground challenging. In such a landscape, the professional association may become marginalized when establishing the professional knowledge base and structures of professional formation, because it will be forced to contribute to government sponsored reviews via consultation which does not guarantee that the association's voice will be heeded (Hordern, 2014, 2016).

The findings of this study provides a deeper understanding of the realities impacting on professionalism in the ECCE sector, specifically of the disproportionate impact of government mandates in ECCE, and early educators' response to government mandates for increased professionalism in ECCE. I recommend further research into professionalism in ECCE be conducted on a much larger scale, employing both quantitative and qualitative methodologies to enhance knowledge for: improving ECCE practitioner professionalism; understanding practitioners' response to and the impact of government mandates on professional work and lives; and ultimately improve teaching and learning in Trinidad and Tobago's ECCE sector. Developing learning organizations within ECCE centers and its impact on children's outcomes are other areas for study. These investigations will have serious implications for ECCE center management and

leadership in the context of recentering practitioners through emerging trends in learning and teaching, and improving practitioner professionalism.

Implications.

A paradigm shift is needed in government's attitude and fiscal will towards the ECCE sector and its workforce in Trinidad and Tobago; at the ECCE Division, the MOE, and society in general. This shift requires moving from the old, still prevalent paradigm of having a vision, figuring out how to get appointed or elected, surrounding selves with supporters, and trying to overcome the opposition – all in the service of doing well. Local experiences have taught, and Fullan (2009) and Senge (2010) have evidenced that this does not work. The new orientation should involve having: a broad directional vision, with humility – listening to others especially those in disagreement; respecting and reconciling differences; unifying opposition on higher ground; identifying win win scenarios; and being hopefully and humbly confident. Fullan (2008) advocated a combination of “love your employees, connect peers with purpose, and capacity building over judge-mentalism, [viewing] learning as the work, transparency (of results and practice) rules, and systems learning to foster deeper organizational reform” (p. 109).

This new paradigm would facilitate emergence of an alternative, democratic professionalism that emphasizes collaboration and alliance building between practitioners and educational stakeholders, and would change power and social relations through reciprocity, collegiality, negotiation, and partnership. According to Sachs (2003, 2016) this democratic professionalism emerges from practitioners, enabled by an activist practitioner identity that could potentially transform beliefs, practices, and work

conditions; driving change from the ground up. Sachs (200, 2016) believed such teacher activism holds more power to enhance the status and conditions of teachers; reposition teachers more equitably in the policy making process; and improve the educational outcomes for students. But also cautioned that professional activism could only happen if principles and practices such as collaborative action amongst colleagues specifically related to activist teacher identity dominated. For example, ECCE practitioners becoming passionately engaged in work practices that are ethically grounded to achieve socially responsible goals.

Democratic professionalism depends upon a changed educational environment as recommended in preceding sections of this chapter, in which new forms and structures of affiliation and association between educational stakeholders are created, that transcend current restrictive structures of teachers' work; by establishing links between teachers' work and wider social responsibilities. Such actions would generate and facilitate social change beginning at local community level, at one ECCE center and spreading to other centers and communities. The stories of practitioner and center achievement, sharing and showing the possibilities of activist, democratic professionalism would gradually connect; driving improvement within and across ECCE centers, the ECCE sector, and exponentially, Trinidad and Tobago's society; thus creating a new national vision of and for the youngest of our citizenry, and the country.

If all of the above including ongoing public education about the roles and functions of ECCE practitioners are enacted; exponential social change will occur ubiquitously, across communities, starting with our youngest, the teachers, families,

government agencies, the MOE, teacher education institution, and the wider national community. Practitioners so empowered will articulate concerns and issues at ECCE centers, advocate for the rights, protection, and optimal development of young children, especially those with special educational needs and families; and work collaboratively with all relevant national agencies and authorities towards resolution. Those actions would develop high professionalism in the ECCE sector; position practitioners as agents of social change; enable entry into policy making debates, decisions, and legislation; and create a highly professional ECCE workforce in Trinidad and Tobago.

Conclusion

In general, Trinidad and Tobago's ECCE sector is swamped with challenges and difficulties, many of which have been identified by the government that attempted to address those shortcomings through official documents and mandates (2005, 2006, & 2009). Those general shortcomings included a dearth of unified professional identity, ineffective and inefficient programs and services, inadequate funding and supports, and poor remuneration and working conditions. The government recognized the centrality of professional education and work conditions to quality service and high outcomes for children. Therefore, government matched capital expenditure with parallel investment in human capital development through tuition free tertiary education for early childhood practitioners, and the construction of state of the art ECCE centers nationwide.

Government also developed National Standards (2005), and a National Curriculum Guide (2006) through which an ideological Trinidad and Tobago child for the new millennium would have emerged. However, this resulted in employment in ECCE

becoming more complex and demanding in terms of the knowledge, skills, dispositions, and attitudes required to promote and support the developing child. Unfortunately, and notwithstanding the development of a qualified ECCE workforce and improved working conditions, little progress has been made in terms of adequately resourcing the ECCE sector, and improving practitioner professionalism and children's achievement, to enable the vision espoused in those initiatives becoming a reality.

Early childhood practitioners in Trinidad and Tobago, and globally; construct a sense of professionalism and professional competences in different environments and context, woven within individual learning paths (Brock, 2012; Campbell-Barr & Bogatic, 2017; Dalli, 2008, 2013; Harwood & Tukonic, 2016; Moloney, 2010b; Morrow, 2010; Moss, 2009, 2015; Osgood, 2012, 2016; Simpson, 2010; Target, 2011; Thomas, 2010; Urban, 2010, 2015). Therefore, wide variation in practitioners' understandings of professionalism in ECCE exist. Trinidad and Tobago is neither unique nor singular in this circumstance. The findings of this study have evidenced similarities with several countries. Yet, some key differences exist in terms of: One, the age ranges of young children served in Trinidad and Tobago's national ECCE program. Two, lax recruitment and selection processes for the ECCE workforce. Three, how policy is changed and mandates handed down to the workforce. And four, how centers are provisioned, staff professional development is conducted, and the dearth of transparent, reliable, continuous assessment of ECCE center programs.

This study highlights the adverse, unintended consequences of government mandates on early childhood practitioners' professionalism in Trinidad and Tobago's

ECCE sector. This included: tensions of mistrust; surveillance within the regulatory system; practitioners becoming blame bearers; the practice of unquestioning compliance, stifling of educational experiences resulting in practitioners' loss of professional integrity and responsibility; the ambiguous and developmentally inappropriate nature of many mandates caused difficulty with interpretation, and determined practitioners decision to resist or comply with mandates. Practitioners' adverse experiences are a direct result of the hierarchical systems established to monitor and control ECCE in Trinidad and Tobago using surveillance and discipline.

Disappointingly, missing from the process of changing a previously informal workforce to a professional workforce is considerations of the impact of mandates and policies on practitioners and programs from international debate regarding professionalism in ECCE (Dalli, 2008, 2013; Karila, 2008; Moss, 2014, 2015; Osgood, 2012, 2016). Trinidad and Tobago should view its transformative reform process as a work in progress, because this study had illuminated missed opportunities and pointed to areas needing urgent attention. Trinidad and Tobago should take comfort in the knowledge that the situation and experience is not singular; in not being alone, as several countries, developed and developing are experiencing and attempting to right similar circumstances.

This study has evidenced ECCE practitioners' commitment to professional practice, leadership, and professional ideals. Many of the constraints identified are eminently amenable to solution through local and central government will, stakeholder and professional organizations collaboration, and national retraining, education, and

sensitization. Early childhood practitioners in both Trinidad and Tobago agree that change is needed and immediate action must be taken if the sector is to improve. This echoes an earlier call from Willis (2009) who reported “it was noticeable above all how clearly EYPs believed change was necessary and action must be taken if the EYPs project is to survive” (p. 9).

Reflection.

My engagement in this investigation and the research process was an arduous journey fraught with medical, financial, occupational, family, emotional events, and hardships. It was a roller coaster of extreme highs and deep lows endured only through the support of my family, colleagues, my chair and mentor, the participants, and my research committee. I could not have achieved success without strong belief, understanding, support, encouragement, and unreserved sharing of stories and experiences. For this, I remain eternally grateful and deeply appreciative. It would be remiss not mention the Walden University community of tutors without whom I would not have developed as a scholarly and professional, enabled to critically investigate the literature through deeper and diverse lens; engaged the research process through student centered tutoring and ongoing dialogue during delivery of course contents. To peers, the many new names I encountered in each course, the discussions and collaboration on assignments that motivated always doing the best, and to give back for the success of all. I have acquired an international circle of friends, colleagues bounded by similar Walden experiences, yet unique trajectories. I thank each for bringing this doctoral study to successful completion. I acknowledge being motivated to help others on the journey, to

consistently live up to and uphold the high ideals and dispositions engendered through the Walden experience.

What have I learned through this process? I have learned that: research is a social, living process just like education; working with people is a dynamic, evolving process that requires willingness to adapt and learn, be an attentive listener, open-minded, and compassionate, empathetic, and taking others' perspectives. Learning to down play thoughts and feeling was difficult and did not seem right. After all, I was experiencing participants' pain and anger; I was part of the system. I was enabled to traverse these difficulties by relying upon and adhering to strict research ethics and procedures. I learned to use and developed a deeper appreciation of journaling, in which I was able to purge feeling after each interview; especially when the interviewee spoke about child abuse and the maltreatment endured. I had great difficulty conceiving the occurrence of those incidents – not at government ECCE centers, not after the stellar work of national pioneers on which practices are premised. I learned that the ECCE ball had been dropped – slam dunk - into a widening pit. I learned of widespread practitioner despair and disillusionment and of the systems' failure to address problems therein. I learned that I could not remain silent in the face of this national crisis. I had to speak up, echo the voices of practitioners, articulate the concerns and engage the process of addressing those problems in collaboration with all other stakeholders.

How do I go about so doing? First, I need to share and disseminate the findings of this study nationally, regionally, and internationally; and work collaboratively with the state and workforce to resolve the problems in ECCE to move the sector forward.

Second, offer consultation and other services to the MOE and ECCE Division to conduct ongoing research in ECCE, and policy matters and issues. Third, offer services to the national university (UTT) to develop ECCE teacher education programs at graduate and post graduate levels to enhance workforce professionalization. Four, continue community service and advocacy for greater collaboration between state agencies and entities involved in early childhood services to synergize efforts for greater needs-based impact. Five, more conscientiously utilize student centered approaches and differentiated instructional strategies in the delivery of teacher education programs nationally and internationally. Six, assist practitioners in conducting action research at respective ECCE centers, to consistently improve practice, starting with the participants in this study who articulated interest in investigating classroom situations. Seven, engage in continuous investigations of local ECCE issues to inform policy decisions and provisions.

Through this study, I have grown personally and as a professional educator. Personally, I am more cautious before speaking. I intend to speak from a more informed position. I have a greater appreciation for the power of speech to help, elevate, empathize, and generate peace rather than add despair, denigrate, disparage or advance the problem. I want to be part of the solution. Professionally, I am better skilled and knowledgeable about conducting research and some ECCE matters. I have become a life-long learner intent on keeping current about global early childhood matters, trends, and research findings. As an educator, I have developed the disposition to learn from and with students as I did from the participants in this study. I am a better listener and have developed some

conflict resolution skills. I am more open to new ideas and change especially using new technology to advance educational aims.

What are my post dissertation plans? First, reconnect with extended family, visit family in foreign lands, and care for my aged, ailing parents. Second, continue advancing early childhood research and publications, locally, regionally, and internationally. Third, revitalize my early childhood advocacy group, increase membership, and seek affiliation with international organizations like NAEYC and the ACEI. Four, actively participate in international conferences on early childhood matters and make linkages with the Trinidad and Tobago sector. Five, seek fellowship and employment at Walden University to serve and give back to the alma matter, advance the institution's vision and international scholarship. My life's work has only just begun.

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Appendix A: First Interview Questions and Probes

First Interview: One-hour long, Semi-Structured Interview Questions

Research Questions:

1. What does the term *teacher professionalism* as defined in government mandates enshrined in the National Standards and Draft Curriculum Guide mean to early childhood practitioners?

Prompt: What influenced you to become an ECCE practitioner?

- a. Please tell me what the term teacher professionalism means to you?
- b. What do you think of teacher professionalism in Trinidad and Tobago ECCE sector?
- c. **Probes:** Describe an event in which an ECCE teacher displayed professionalism?
- d. Describe an event in which an ECCE teacher did not display professionalism?
What can you say to other ECCE teachers to help improve their professionalism?

Research Sub-Question:

2. In what ways did early childhood practitioners' definitions of professionalism differ from official definitions?

Prompt: Do you agree with how teacher professionalism is defined in the School Code of Conduct?

Do you agree with how teacher professionalism is defined in the National Standards Document?

Do you agree with how teacher professionalism is defined in the Draft National Curriculum Guide?

What do those definitions mean to you?

Are the definitions in those documents relevant to the reality of ECCE?

i. What would you change in those definitions? Why?

Probes: How is your definition of professionalism different from the government's definition of professionalism?

j. Why do you think those differences exist?

k. How is your definition of professionalism similar to the government's definition?

l. How are ECCE teachers, your colleagues talking about professionalism?

m. Do you see any similarities/ties between what ECCE teachers say about professionalism and the government's definitions?

n. How would you like the government to think of and write about teacher professionalism in ECCE?

Research Sub-Question:

3. In the view of practitioners, how did government mandates impact professionalism and the personal lives of early childhood practitioners?

Prompt: Please talk about how government mandates impact your professionalism?

Probes: How has your work with children changed to meet: The School Code of Conduct? Draft National Curriculum Guide? And the Standards Document?

What benefits have government mandates: The Standards Document, Draft

Curriculum Guide, and School Code of Conduct provided for you?

Tell me more about the benefits provided by government mandates?

What challenges have government mandates: The Standards Document, Draft

Curriculum Guide, and School Code of Conduct posed for you?

Please talk about some of the challenges posed by government mandates?

What do you want to see changed in the School Code, The Standards Document, and

the Curriculum Guide?

Why do you want those changes?

Research Sub-Question:

4. How did early childhood practitioners think those impacts should be addressed?

Prompt: How did you cope with the challenges you described earlier?

Probes: How do you think the government can minimize those challenges?

What support do you need to minimize the challenges posed by government mandates?

What support do you need to improve your professionalism?

How has your professional life benefitted from government mandates?

Thank you for speaking and sharing this rich information with me. I will bring you the transcript of your interview for reviewing next week. Please feel free to make any changes – corrections, additions or omissions you want to it. I will contact you after three days to find out if you have completed the review, and the transcript is ready for collection.

Appendix B: Second Interview Protocol

(One Hour Long)

Thank you for agreeing to attend for a second interview. The purpose of this interview is four fold:

1. to get feedback from you about the transcript of your first interview,
2. to ask questions not asked at the first interview,
3. to obtain additional information from you, and
4. to clarify some of the responses you gave at the first interview.

Purpose 1: Prompt: Tell me about the transcript of your first interview?

Probes: Was anything left out of the transcript?

What do you want to add to the transcript?

What do you want to change?

Purpose 2: Prompt: Ask any question/s not posed at the first interview will be asked here along with prompts and probes.

Purpose 3: Having read the transcript, is there anything else you want to share that you did not say in the first interview?

Purpose 4: Let us revisit the transcript of your first interview: go to page

What did you mean when you said

Then on page what did you mean by ?

On page you said “quote” can you please clarify/explain this some more?

Is there anything else you want to say?

Thank you for speaking with me a second time. I will include the new information and clarifications you have provided into the data, and will present all to you at the first Focus Group meeting on (Date, Venue, and Time). Participant is given the Focus Group Invitation.

Appendix C: First Focus Group Protocol

First Focus Group Meeting

Research Questions:

1. What does the term *teacher professionalism* as defined in government mandates enshrined in the National Standards and Draft Curriculum Guide mean to early childhood practitioners?

Prompt: Review interview responses to this question, what would you change?

Why?

What would you add? Why?

Probes: Are there any responses you disagree with? Why? How should those responses be treated? Why?

Research Sub-Question:

2. In what ways did early childhood practitioners' definitions of professionalism differ from official definitions?

Prompt: What more can you add to those responses? Why? What would you change? Why?

Probes: Do you agree with those responses? Why? Which responses would you change? Why? How would you change them? How should those responses be treated?

Research Sub-Question:

3. In the view of practitioners, how did government mandates impact professionalism and the personal lives of early childhood practitioners?

Prompt: What more can you add to those responses? Why? What would you change? Why?

Probes: Do you agree with those responses? Why? Which responses would you change? Why? How would you change them? How should those responses be treated?

Research Sub-Question:

4. How did early childhood practitioners think those impacts should be addressed?

Prompt: What more can you add to those responses? Why? What would you change? Why?

Probes: Do you agree with those responses? Why? Which responses would you change? Why? How would you change them? How should those responses be treated? Is there anything else you want to add?

Document Analysis – Alongside Practitioners’ Voices:

1. Early Educators’ Voices - (derived from analysis of interviews)
2. Major elements of professionalism from practitioners’ perspectives
3. Major challenges to professionalism from practitioners’ perspectives
4. Major elements of professionalism found in official documents: School Code of Conduct, Draft National Curriculum Guide, and Standards Document
5. Participants will review the Data Wall Chart and provide feedback. They will respond to:
 - a. How do you feel about those findings?
 - b. Do you agree with the findings?

- c. Is your voice represented in the findings?
- d. What more do you want to add to the findings?
- e. Is there any finding you do not agree with? (discrepant views)
- f. How should that finding be treated? (discrepant views)
- g. Can the wording be changed? If so, please change the wording?
- h. Does everyone agree to/with the new wording?
- i. Is data analysis complete?
- j. Is there anything else you want to say that you did not say before?

Participants, I thank you for attending and participating so willingly in this, our first FGM. We will meet for our second Focus Group encounter, three weeks from today in Tobago, I will bring your travel tickets to you, on (date and time will be decided then). At the second FGM we will discuss how professionalism in early childhood care and education can be improved, and review the current data analysis.

Please travel safely home, record any other thoughts in your journals, and bring them to the second FGM at which I will collect them.

Appendix D: Second Focus Group Protocol

Second Focus Group Meeting: Discussion: Improving Professionalism in ECCE

A brief review of the research findings will be presented. Participant will read along with their printout, briefly share their thoughts or write final thoughts in their journals before handing same to the researcher.

Task:

- Each participant is given segments of data from their interviews data to place under research questions to which they think each segment belongs.
- Each participant will share one idea of how professionalism can be improved to provide new/different ideas.
- Peers discuss the idea tabled and make suggestions/ recommendations thus, extending suggestions/ideas.
- Participants will record on flip charts any idea not tabled, the group discusses those making additional suggestions.

Thank you participants, for actively engaging this research project, for sharing your thoughts, ideas and feelings with me personally, and anonymously with the world by extension. I have enjoyed this experience tremendously, and I hope the same can be said for each of you. Through this research we have strengthened our relationship, ignited new friendships, enhanced professional collaboration, and established a professional support group. I thank you.

Each participant is invited to attend the De-Briefing Lunch.

Appendix E: Journaling Instructions and Prompts

At the end of the first interview, each participant will be provided with a letter-size spiral bound notebook and one pen. Participants will be reminded of the journaling aspect of the study, given the following verbal instructions and a copy of the journaling instructions and prompts:

- Each journal entry must be dated, write the start time, respond to the relevant prompt, write for 10 minutes only, and record the end time. After 10 minutes you must stop writing. This process must be repeated for each journal entry.
- Starting after your first interview, you are required to reflect on the interview and write a reflection on same which includes:

Prompt 1- What did you want to say at the first interview, but did not get an opportunity to say?

Prompt 2: Please share your interview experience.

Please respond to those two (2) prompts after your first interview.

After you have reviewed and returned the transcript of your first interview, you are to reflect on the transcript review process and write your response to the following prompt for 10 minutes:

Prompt 3: How did you feel when reviewing the transcript of your first interview?

After the second interview, you will reflect on same and write for your response to the following prompt for 10 minutes:

Prompt 4: What was your second interview like?

At this point in the research process, each participant should have provided the researcher with two activity plans.

Please reflect on this request and respond to the following prompt for 10 minutes:

Prompt 5: Please tell me how you felt about sharing your activity plans.

Please respond to those two (2) prompts.

After the first focus group, you will reflect on your experience and write for 10 minutes your response to the following two prompts:

Prompt 6: Please share your focus group experience.

Prompt 7: How do you feel about keeping the identities of all participants and all that was said at the focus group meeting confidential?

Please respond to the following:

After the second focus group meeting, you will reflect on your experience throughout the entire research process and respond to the final prompt in 10 minutes:

Prompt 8: Please tell me how you feel about your participation in this research study.

Please remember to bring your journal to the De-Briefing event, and hand same to me then. I could not have engaged this study without your voluntary participation. Please

accept my deepest appreciation and acknowledgement of your commitment throughout this research process, and for the wealth of rich information you so willingly provided.

In appreciation and with acknowledgement

Cynthia Celestin

Researcher

Appendix F: The De-Briefing Lunch

Participants Exit Research Study

Participants, including expert reviewers, will be provided with copies of the research findings inclusive of new data, and changes/additions they made at the second Focus Group Meeting.

They will provide additional feedback, be assured that any changes they recommend will be made and sent to them before the document is submitted to Walden University and for IRB approval.

Participants will be kept abreast of the research status, approval, and subsequent publication.