

**AN EXPLORATION OF TEACHER BELIEFS AND PRACTICES  
WITHIN A CONTEXT OF EFFECTIVE PEDAGOGY IN GRADE  
R /RECEPTION YEAR CLASSES IN THE GREATER DURBAN  
AREA OF KWAZULU- NATAL**

By

**ESSACK AYESHA B.O.**

**Student number: 205522348**

Thesis submitted in fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

**Master in Education  
(100% Full Dissertation)**

In the Faculty of Education  
University of KwaZulu-Natal

Durban, South Africa

2011

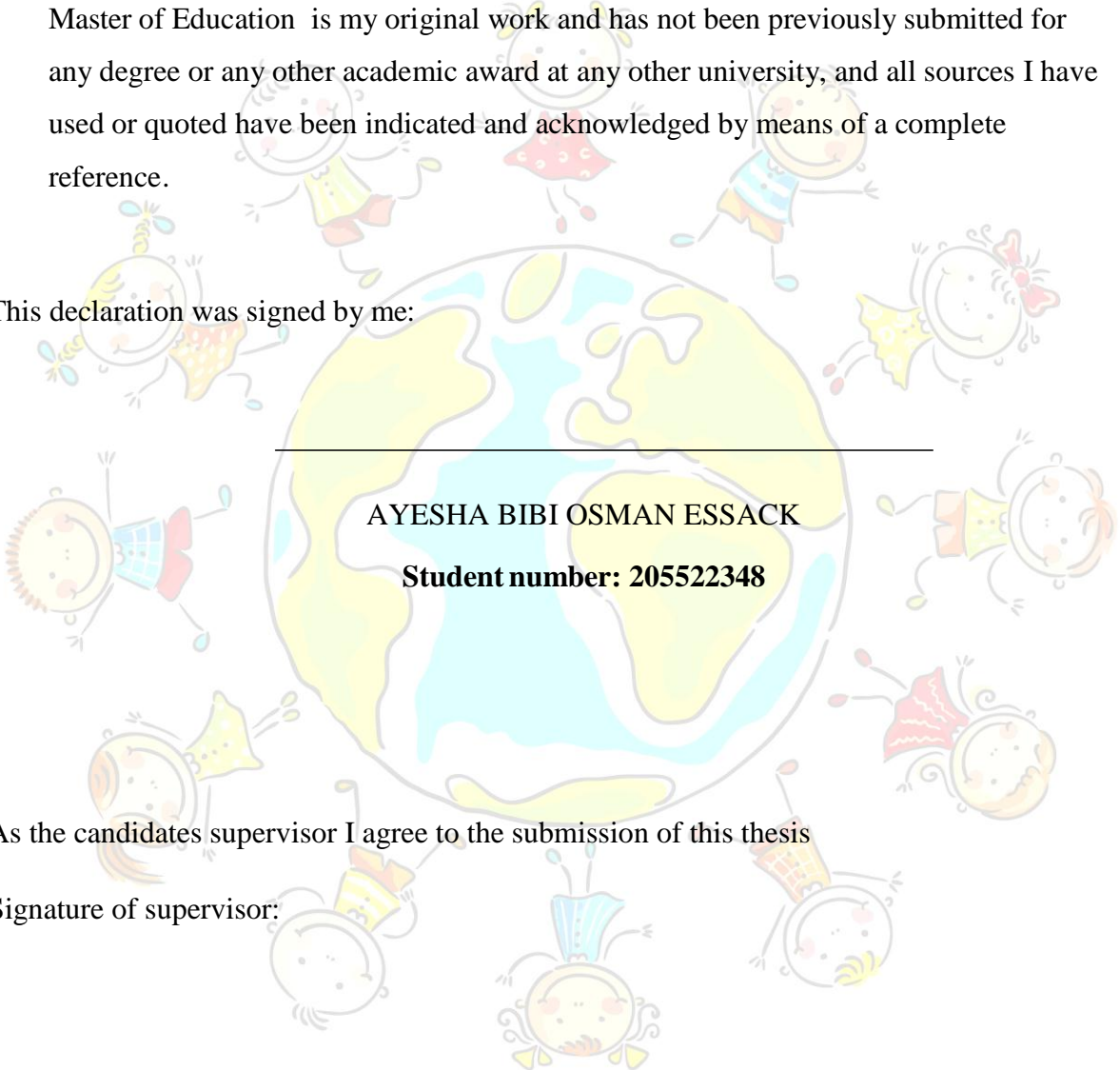
**Supervisor:** Professor Reshma Sookrajh, UKZN

## DECLARATION

### I, **AYESHA BIBI OSMAN ESSACK**

do hereby declare that this thesis which is submitted to the university for the degree of Master of Education is my original work and has not been previously submitted for any degree or any other academic award at any other university, and all sources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of a complete reference.

This declaration was signed by me:



---

**AYESHA BIBI OSMAN ESSACK**  
**Student number: 205522348**

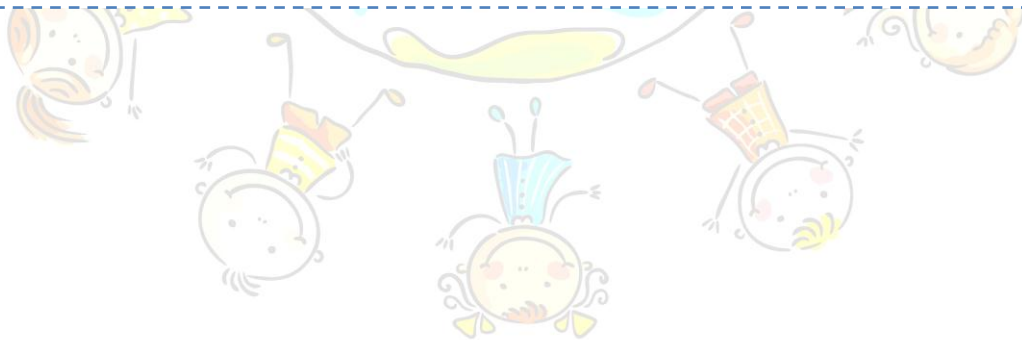
As the candidates supervisor I agree to the submission of this thesis

Signature of supervisor:

# Dedication

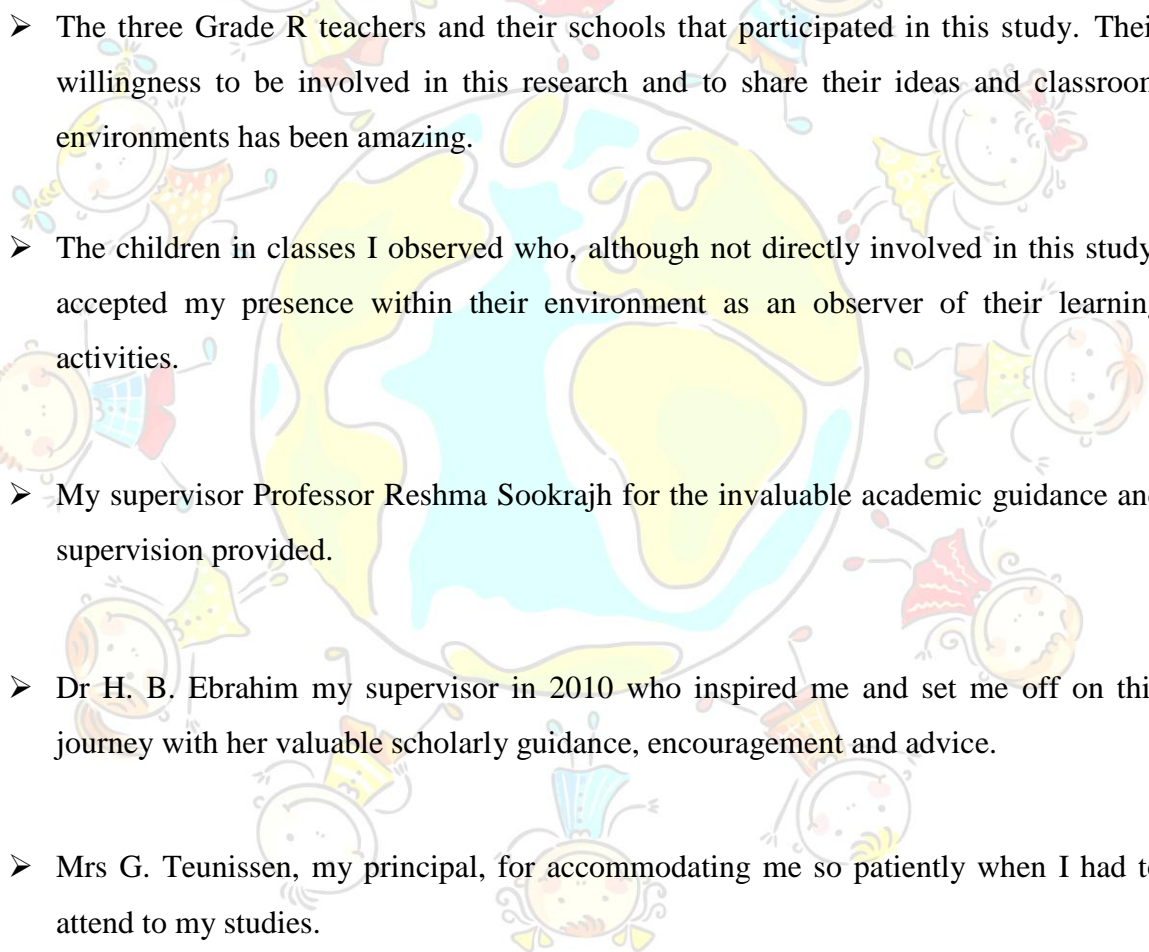


I dedicate this thesis to my family who fill my life with immeasurable joy and inspire me to be a better person. My deepest gratitude goes to my parents, husband, children and other family members for their belief in my abilities which inspired me to undertake such a colossal project. They have been a tower of strength and kindness without which this thesis, as well as a great deal of my personal happiness, would not have been possible. This has been the most torturous, tiring, yet greatest learning experience I have ever had.



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost I would to thank the Almighty for giving me the strength and opportunity to continue my studies. It is with a deep sense of gratitude and appreciation that I acknowledge the support and guidance received from numerous people while working on this research project. I am deeply indebted to the following people for their unwavering support and would like to convey my grateful thanks. They are:

- 
- The three Grade R teachers and their schools that participated in this study. Their willingness to be involved in this research and to share their ideas and classroom environments has been amazing.
  - The children in classes I observed who, although not directly involved in this study, accepted my presence within their environment as an observer of their learning activities.
  - My supervisor Professor Reshma Sookrajh for the invaluable academic guidance and supervision provided.
  - Dr H. B. Ebrahim my supervisor in 2010 who inspired me and set me off on this journey with her valuable scholarly guidance, encouragement and advice.
  - Mrs G. Teunissen, my principal, for accommodating me so patiently when I had to attend to my studies.
  - My friends and colleagues, especially Carmel Chetty, for their constructive comments and guidance, unwavering moral support, motivation and encouragement.

## Abstract

This research presents an understanding of Grade R teachers' beliefs and practices, and elucidates factors that constrain the belief practice domain. In asking the question, "What are the beliefs and practices of Grade R teachers within a context of effective pedagogy in Grade R/Reception Year classes in the greater Durban area of KwaZulu-Natal?" I produced data from Grade R teachers' perspectives. I reported on their beliefs on pedagogy, and the nuances of their practice, in order to develop an understanding of the different dimensions of pedagogy in Grade R.

Using a qualitative, exploratory case study design I produced data on three Grade R teachers from different ethnic backgrounds, in three public schools, in the greater Durban area. The schools chosen varied from low, to middle class socio-economic backgrounds, catering for learners from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds. A multi-method approach of data-collection was followed. This study used the social constructivist theory of Vygotsky, as a theoretical lens through which teacher beliefs and practices were examined.

Drawing largely on data from observations and interviews, the findings of this study concluded that although teachers were observed to generally follow their pedagogic beliefs, several points of difference between their beliefs and practices existed. This study found that the belief practice domain was affected by a number of contingent factors such as teachers' understanding of the curriculum, teacher training and qualifications, and support from the Education Department, school and parents. In addition, contextual factors such as working conditions, learner-teacher ratios, provision of resources and facilities also affected teacher practice. There was evidence of a high value placed upon learning through play. However, the findings of this study illuminate the need for training Grade R teachers in: creating the conditions for learning through play, the use of collaborative play approaches, and guidance on scaffolding children's learning. This study concludes that the absence of an educational programme geared towards multiculturalism and diversity is of great concern.

# Table of Contents

Declaration .....	ii
Dedication.....	iii
Acknowledgements .....	iv
Abstract.....	v
Table of Contents .....	v1
List of Tables .....	x1
List of Images .....	x1
List of Abbreviations .....	x1
<b>Chapter 1: Orientation</b>	
<b>1.1 Introduction.....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>1.2 Background to the Study .....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>1.3 Problem Statement .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>1.4 Rationale for the Study .....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>1.5 Research Question .....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>1.6 Purpose and objectives of the Study .....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>1.7 Significance of the Study.....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>1.8 Overview of Research Design and Methodology.....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>1.9 Delimiting the Study.....</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>1.10 Overview of the study.....</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>1.11 Conclusion.....</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>Chapter 2: Literature Review .....</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>2.1 Introduction.....</b>	<b>16</b>

<b>2.2 Historical Background .....</b>	<b>17</b>
2.2.1 The Apartheid Era .....	17
2.2.1 Post-Apartheid Developments.....	19
<b>2.3 Defining the concept of Pedagogy and Practice .....</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>2.4 Studies on Effective Pedagogy in the early years .....</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>2.5 Literature on play and its impact on learning.....</b>	<b>33</b>
<b>2.6 Exploring Teacher Beliefs and understandings on Pedagogy.....</b>	<b>36</b>
<b>2.7 Conclusion.....</b>	<b>40</b>
<b>Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework.....</b>	<b>42</b>
<b>3.1 Introduction .....</b>	<b>42</b>
<b>3.2 Learning Precedes Development .....</b>	<b>43</b>
<b>3.3 Cultural mediation and the development of higher mental functions .....</b>	<b>44</b>
<b>3.4 Thought and language .....</b>	<b>45</b>
<b>3.5 The zone of proximal development (ZPD) .....</b>	<b>47</b>
<b>3.6 The more knowledgeable other (MKO) Scaffolding, Guided Participation.....</b>	<b>49</b>
<b>3.7 The role of play in children learning and development .....</b>	<b>52</b>
3.7.1 Play develops cognitive skills .....	53
3.7.2 Play develops social skills .....	54
3.7.3 Play expands imagination .....	55
<b>3.8 Critics of Vygotsky’s theory .....</b>	<b>56</b>
<b>3.9 Contemporary curriculum models that draw from Vygotsky’s approach.....</b>	<b>57</b>
3.9.1 Te Whāriki.....	58
3.9.2 Reggio Emilia .....	59
<b>3.10 Conclusion .....</b>	<b>60</b>

<b>Chapter 4: Research Methodology .....</b>	<b>62</b>
<b>4.1 Introduction.....</b>	<b>62</b>
<b>4.2 Research Approach .....</b>	<b>62</b>
<b>4.3 Research Design.....</b>	<b>63</b>
4.3.1 Case Study .....	63
4.3.2 The study sample: The schools and teachers .....	65
<b>4.4 Research Question .....</b>	<b>68</b>
<b>4.5 Negotiating Access .....</b>	<b>69</b>
<b>4.6 Data collection .....</b>	<b>70</b>
4.6.1 Semi-structured interviews .....	71
4.6.2 Observation .....	73
4.6.3 Document Review .....	74
<b>4.7 Data Management, Storage and Protection .....</b>	<b>75</b>
<b>4.8 Data Analysis.....</b>	<b>76</b>
<b>4.9 Validity and reliability .....</b>	<b>78</b>
<b>4.10 Ethical Considerations.....</b>	<b>79</b>
4.10.1 Voluntary Participation and Informed Consent .....	79
4.10.2 Confidentiality .....	80
4.10.3 Deception in Research .....	80
<b>4.11 Limitations of the study .....</b>	<b>80</b>
<b>4.12 Conclusion .....</b>	<b>80</b>
<b>Chapter 5: Findings: Presentation and Discussion .....</b>	<b>81</b>
<b>5.1 Introduction .....</b>	<b>81</b>
<b>5.2 Introducing the Research Participants.....</b>	<b>82</b>
<b>5.3 Research Themes .....</b>	<b>83</b>
<b>5.4 Research Findings .....</b>	<b>84</b>



<b>5.4.1 Theme 1- Learning Environment .....</b>	<b>84</b>
5.4.1.1 The indoor learning environment .....	84
5.4.1.2 Outdoor learning environment .....	91
<b>5.4.2 Theme 2-Beliefs relating to teaching strategies and classroom management .....</b>	<b>95</b>
5.4.2.1 Strategies to cater for diversity and multiculturalism .....	95
5.4.2.2 Beliefs and practices on different types of teaching strategies .....	100
5.2.2.3 Beliefs and practices on the use of play, discovery and problem solving.....	106
5.2.2.4 Teaching strategies or practices during school readiness .....	112
5.4.2.5 Beliefs and practices on classroom management strategies.....	119
<b>5.4.3 Theme 3 - Planning, curriculum and professional development.....</b>	<b>124</b>
5.4.3.1 Beliefs and practices relating to planning and curriculum.....	125
5.4.3.2 Professional development and curriculum support.....	133
<b>5.4.4 Theme 4 –Beliefs and practices relating to assessment .....</b>	<b>135</b>
<b>5.4.5 Theme 5- Beliefs and practices relating to parental involvement .....</b>	<b>139</b>
<b>5. 5. Conclusion.....</b>	<b>143</b>
<b>Chapter 6: Conclusions and Implications of the Study.....</b>	<b>145</b>
<b>6.1 Introduction.....</b>	<b>145</b>
<b>6.2 Summary and Main Findings.....</b>	<b>145</b>
<b>6.3 Challenges that impacted on teachers’ beliefs and practices .....</b>	<b>149</b>
6.3.1 Class Size .....	149
6.3.2 Space and Resources .....	149
6.3.3 Curriculum .....	150
6.3.4 Teacher Qualification.....	151
6.3.5 Inclusion .....	151
6.3.6 Parental Pressure .....	152

6.3.7 Principals Expectations .....	153
6.3.8 Professional Development .....	153
<b>6.4 Implications of the study and recommendations for improvement in Grade R practice. ....</b>	<b>154</b>
6.4.1 Learning Environment.....	154
6.4.2 Teaching and Classroom Management Strategies .....	155
6.4.3 Planning, Curriculum and Professional Development.....	156
6.4.4 Assessment .....	158
6.4.5 Parental Involvement Implications for Support.....	158
<b>6.5 Additional recommendations for improvement in Grade R teacher practices.....</b>	<b>159</b>
<b>6.6 Future research .....</b>	<b>160</b>
<b>6.8 Conclusion .....</b>	<b>161</b>
<b>References Cited .....</b>	<b>164</b>
<b>Appendix A: Letter of Authorisation from KZN Department of Education .....</b>	<b>184</b>
<b>Appendix B: Ethical Clearance Certificate from the UKZN Research Ethics Committee .....</b>	<b>185</b>
<b>Appendix C1: Letter of Informed Consent from the School Governing Body and Principal....</b>	<b>186</b>
<b>Appendix C2: Letter of Informed Consent from the Teacher Participant .....</b>	<b>187</b>
<b>Appendix C3: Letter of information to parents about research being conducted at school.....</b>	<b>188</b>
<b>Appendix D: Selected Transcribed Interview .....</b>	<b>189</b>
<b>Appendix E: Selected Classroom Observation Schedule.....</b>	<b>200</b>
<b>Appendix F: Proof of Editing.....</b>	<b>212</b>

## List of Tables

Table 4.1 Data Collection Schedule .....	71
Table 4.2 Phases of Thematic Analysis .....	77
Table 5.1 Research Participants .....	82

## List of Figures

Figure 4.1 Demographic Sample of study.....	66
---	----

## List of Abbreviations and Acronyms



ANA	Annual National Assessment
ANC	African National Congress
B.Ed.	Bachelor's Degree in Education
BPP	Bridging Period Programme
CAP	Contextually Appropriate Practice
CAPS	Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statements
CEPD	Centre for Education Policy Development
CPDT	Continuing Professional Development for Teachers
DET	Department of Education and Training
DoE	Department of Education
DAP	Developmentally Appropriate Practice
DBE	Department of Basic Education
DRNCS	Draft Revised National Curriculum Statement
ECD	Early Childhood Development
ECE	Early Childhood Education
EFA	Education for All
EPPE	Effective Provision of Pre-school Education
EYLF	Early Years Learning Framework

FFL	Foundations for Learning
Grade R	The Reception Year, a year-long programme preceding Grade 1
HoD	Head of Department
IPECD	Interim Policy for Early Childhood Development
KZN	KwaZulu-Natal
MKO	More Knowledgeable Other
NAEYC	National Association for the Education and Care of Young Children
NAPTOSA	National Professional Teachers' Organisation of SA
NCS	National Curriculum Statement
NEPI	National Education Policy Investigation
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organisations
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
OBE	Outcomes Based Education
PEDs	Provincial Education Departments
QSRLS	Queensland School Reform Longitudinal Study
REPEY	Researching Effective Pedagogy in the Early Years
REQV	Relative Education Qualification Values
RNCS	Revised National Curriculum Statement
SAIDE	South African Institute for Distance Education
SPEEL	Study of Pedagogical Effectiveness in Early Learning
UKZN	University of KwaZulu-Natal
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Fund
UNISA	University of South Africa
WITS	University of the Witwatersrand
WSoE	Wits School of Education
ZPD	Zone of Proximal Development

# Chapter 1

## Introducing the study: Orientation and Background

### 1.1 Introduction

Rafi Cavoukian (2006, p. xviii) editor of the book *Child Honouring* states:

Across all cultures, we find an essential humanity that is most visible in early childhood—a playful, intelligent, and creative way of being. Early experience lasts a lifetime. It shapes our sense of self and how we see others; it also shapes our sense of what's possible, our emerging view of the world. The impressionable early years are the most vulnerable to family dynamics, cultural values, and planetary condition.

Rafi Cavoukian highlights the importance of early childhood experiences and how it shapes our vulnerable and precious children. Teachers play a significant role in guiding young learners as they provide experiences that last a lifetime. An exploration of their beliefs and practices will provide significant insights into the types of educational experiences that our young impressionable children are exposed to. It is with this conviction that I undertake this journey of exploring teacher beliefs and practices within a context of effective pedagogy in Grade R/Reception<sup>1</sup> classes.

Irwin, Siddiqi & Hertzman (2007, p. 3) argued that “what children experience during the early years sets a critical foundation for their entire life course.” The South African government has prioritised early childhood development with several policy implementations since 1994. Specifically, there is high commitment to making Grade R a universal<sup>2</sup> provision of quality (Department of Education (DoE), 2001c, p. 5). While much progress has been made in South Africa in getting children into Grade R classes, the content and quality of provision is crucial to closing gaps for children from underprivileged backgrounds.

From the time children are born, up until eight years of age, their cognitive, intellectual, social, emotional and physical developmental needs and capabilities differ from children in higher grades (National Association for the Education and Care of Young Children

---

<sup>1</sup> In this research study, the terms Reception Year and Grade R are used interchangeably to refer to the first year of formal schooling which caters for children at 5 years of age turning 6.

<sup>2</sup> One of the main policy priorities of the Department of Education is the establishment of a national system of provision of the Reception Year that combines a large public and smaller independent component.

(NAEYC), 1997). For this reason, the programme structure, the types of activities prepared, the teaching and learning styles used, the way the learning space is arranged, and the assessment methods used, are different from those for older children. Early childhood programmes focus on shared and responsive interaction between children and teachers, and between children and their peers (DoE, 2008, p, 14). The National Curriculum Statement (NCS) is based on the belief that children learn best, when they follow their own interests, when they work with a variety of materials, when they are free to express their thoughts and ideas and when they have supportive teachers. Teachers are practising this belief when they design a daily programme that creates a balance between teacher-initiated activities and child-initiated activities, within a flexible yet structured manner (DoE, 2008, p. 15). However, evidence gathered by Department of Education officials and scientific research reports reflect that teaching in Grade R remains a challenge. To date, there are an estimated 14 000 Grade R classes country wide where Grade R programmes are provided to approximately 490 000 Grade R learners. However, monitoring and evaluation reports show evidence that only a small percentage of quality Grade R programmes could be found in the country (DoE, 2008, p. 1). Also evident in most Grade R classes is the preference of teachers to use an ‘instructional approach’. Learners are found seated at tables doing very formal activities much like Grade 1 learners (DoE, 2008, p. 1). To gain added insight into what goes on in Grade R classes my study explores the beliefs and practices of selected Grade R teachers within a context of effective pedagogy.

In this chapter, I provide a background to the study. I focus on the importance of quality education in Grade R and the need to qualify what constitutes effective pedagogy in this grade. This is followed with a brief account of the problem statement. In addition, I explain the rationale and justify the purpose of the study, before stating the research question and the methodology guiding the study. Finally, the chapter provides an overview of the thesis.

## **1.2 Background to the Study**

According to the South African annual United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) report (2009), the birth of democracy led to a considerable improvement in educational

opportunities for children from previously disadvantaged backgrounds. It is evident that the government allocates a huge budget for resources in education—around 5.4% of its gross domestic product in 2008/09. However, the results achieved, fail to match this large scale of investment (UNICEF, 2009, p. 6). Poor academic achievements and consistently low scores in international Numeracy, Literacy and Reading assessments are of great concern (UNICEF, 2009). This year, the 2011 Annual National Assessment <sup>3</sup> (ANA) results were released. In Grade 3, the average performance is 35% in Literacy and 28% in Numeracy. In Grade 6, the average performance is 28% in Languages and 30% for Mathematics. In addition, 47% of Grade 3 learners achieved more than 35% in Literacy, and 34% achieved above 35% in Numeracy (Department of Basic Education (DBE), 2011a). The National Professional Teachers' Organisation of SA (NAPTOSA) labelled the results 'shocking'. NAPTOSA president, Esrah Ramasehla, said the Education Department needs to focus on teacher training if the results are to improve to 60% by 2014 (Esrah Ramasehla in Grobbelaar, 2011). According to Bloch (2009, p. 12), 60% to 80% of South African schools are dysfunctional. He elaborated: "They produce barely literate and numerate learners and I believe the country is headed for a national education crisis." This view is supported by the 2008 Eastern Cape research team who cautioned that:

The usefulness of the Reception Year to assist children to be literate, numerate and life-ready at the required levels must be called into question in the light of the evidence of illiteracy of children in Grade 6 as cited in the National Reading Strategy 2008. Will the Reception Year assist in raising levels of literacy or will it be absorbed into the status quo and become part of the problem? (Eastern Cape Department of Education, 2008, p. 9).

In a recent joint UMALUSI<sup>4</sup>, Centre for Education Policy Development (CEPD) & University of Witwatersrand (WITS) Seminar in April 2010, Linington & Excell responded to the question "Will Grade R really improve the quality of South African education?" Their answer was 'no'. They mentioned that the type of Grade R needed in South Africa requires much thought and action. They argued that Grade R can and should be conceptualised in ways other than those currently being implemented to ensure its effectiveness (UMALUSI,

---

<sup>3</sup> The Annual National Assessments are standardised national assessments for languages and mathematics in the intermediate phase (Grades 4 – 6) and in literacy and numeracy for the foundation phase (Grades 1 – 3).

<sup>4</sup> UMALUSI is the quality assurer in the general and further education and training bands of the national qualifications framework (NQF). The Council ensures that the providers of education and training have the capacity to deliver and assess qualifications and learning programmes and are doing so to expected standards of quality.

CEPD & WITS Seminar, 2010, pp. 8-9). Grade R is a vital year in a child's life as it serves as an important link between the earliest years and the start of formal schooling (Wits School of Education (WSoE), 2009). At a colloquium held on May 19<sup>th</sup>, 2010 at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN), the Director of Early Childhood, Marie Louise Samuels, stated that this link needs to be strengthened by access to quality Grade R programmes. This, she argued, would result from the implementation of appropriate teaching and learning according to the needs of Grade R learners. This is difficult given that there is much confusion as to what quality Grade R entails. The National Treasury report (2008) has already rung the alarm bells. The report calls for the Department of Education (DoE) to set out clearly what a quality Grade R class entails, including being explicit about the importance of structured play for this age group, the expected methodologies to achieve Grade R learning outcomes, and a number of measures and indicators that can be used to judge the quality of provision. Without such clarity, it is likely that the focus will continue to be on numerical targets regarding access to Grade R which unfortunately does not equate to quality learning (National Treasury, 2008, p. 11).

On the same note, Linington & Excell (2010) state that it is imperative for teachers in Grade R to have certain basic understandings to drive quality Grade R programmes. They view an understanding of the holistic development of young children, preparation for lifelong learning, development of sound learning dispositions and preparation for the next grade as critical to quality practice. The authors further note that choice of aims for Grade R determines what happens with children in Grade R classrooms. They stress that Grade R is in some way a homeless construct. It sits with one leg in the pre-school and the other in the gateway to formal schooling. It is the first year of the Foundation Phase<sup>5</sup> and at the same time the last year of the pre-school phase<sup>6</sup>. The confusion lies in ascertaining from where Grade R draws its identity. They emphasise that Grade R should not be a 'watered down' Grade 1 and should instead enable children to refine the knowledge, skills, values and attitudes that will stand them in good stead in formal schooling. Their research in Grade R classrooms in Gauteng, South Africa has shown that teachers focus on the three R's (**R**eading, **W**riting and

---

<sup>5</sup> Foundation Phase refers to Grades R, Grade 1, Grade 2 & Grade 3.

<sup>6</sup> Preschool refers to privately operated or community nursery schools for children less than 5 years of age.



Arithmetic) and drive to implement a strong school readiness approach which has limited the possibilities for effective practice as suggested in the National Curriculum Statement (WSOE, 2009).

Knowledge about what teachers believe to be quality Grade R programmes and how it is concretised in pedagogical processes is limited. This research study is timely, given the concerns with the quality of education in Grade R classes. Upon reading the negative press around these issues an exploration of teacher beliefs and practices in selected Grade R classes within a context of effective pedagogy will yield important insights. Since teachers' beliefs might determine children's educational experiences, there is a need to explore aspects of the belief practice domain so as to contribute to literature on pedagogy in Grade R classes.

### **1.3 Problem Statement**

Characteristics such as, participation, co-operation, communication and interaction are often linked to high quality education in early childhood (NAEYC, 1991). Some indicators of quality in relation to children's outcomes are listed as more important than others by researchers of quality in pre-school. However, the teacher's approach is considered as the most significant indicator of quality (NAEYC, 1991). The underlying statement of my study is that the creation of a high quality pedagogical environment rests heavily on the beliefs and practices adopted by teachers. In practice, the degree of quality is ascertained by what teachers do in the Grade R classrooms to motivate and challenge children to learn and develop their skills. What determines teachers' different responses in classroom contexts? Research has revealed that teachers draw from their own experiences and knowledge to decide what constitutes appropriate learning experiences (Lin, Lawrence & Gorrell, 2002, p, 227; Foote, Smith, & Ellis, 2004, p, 136; Wang, Elicker, McMullen, & Mao, 2008, pp. 243-246). Significant to teachers' decisions about children's educational experiences, are their beliefs (Lee & Ginsburg, 2007, p, 4; Wang et al., 2008, p, 228). It is, therefore, natural to assume that teachers' beliefs are likely to influence their objectives or practices (Lee, 2006, p. 433). The official curriculum prescribes learning outcomes and assessment standards for learning and teaching in Grade R (DoE, 2003). However, Bailey (2000, p. 116) highlights that the disconnection between policy assumptions and teachers classroom realities can marginalise teachers, if it fails to take their teaching contexts or their core beliefs into consideration. A 2007 report by McKinsey & Company places the responsibility of

performance squarely on teachers, and makes a bold assertion that: “the quality of an education system cannot exceed the quality of its teachers” (p. 39). Their study found that the world’s top 10 performing school systems had three things in common: First, the right people were chosen to become teachers, then these teachers were equipped to become effectual instructors, and third, they made sure that all children were able to benefit from outstanding instruction (McKinsey & Company, 2007, p. 39). This report highlighted that the quality of education offered in Grade R depends on the actions of the teacher. Research conducted in Grade R by the Wits School of Education (WSoE, 2009) concluded that we need a teacher who can: Demonstrate an understanding of how children learn, create an appropriate early learning environment, be sensitive to contextual and other factors, implement an appropriate and purposeful play-based Grade R programme, focus on issues relating to diversity and social justice and finally mediate learning and reflect on their practice.

Given the influence of early experiences on children’s learning, the role of the Grade R teacher becomes a critical factor for children’s progress. Much of the pedagogic and curricular choices that teachers make are based on the educational beliefs that they hold (Nespor, 1987; Isenberg, 1990; Kagan, 1992). These beliefs impact on teachers’ instructional strategies and warrant an investigation. Fullan & Hargreaves (1996) maintain that differences between schools and teachers have implications for the quality, effectiveness and excellence of teaching. Insight into what constitutes quality in a South African context is limited. According to UNICEF (2000) a child’s right to a quality education includes:

- Learners who are, well-nourished, healthy and ready to learn and participate;
- Environments that provide sufficient resources and facilities that are safe, gender-sensitive, healthy and protective;
- Content that is manifested in relevant materials and curricula for the attainment of basic skills, particularly in the areas of skills for life, Numeracy and Literacy.
- Procedures in which qualified teachers use child-centred pedagogic approaches together with proficient assessment to enable learning and diminish disparities; and
- Outcomes for education that are linked to national goals and include knowledge, skills and attitudes, for positive participation in society (UNICEF, 2000, p. 3).

According to UNICEF (2000, p. 3) this definition “allows for an understanding of education as a complex system embedded in a political, cultural and economic context.” This raises two questions: Do Grade R teachers hold beliefs that encompass some of the features of this definition of quality? Do their practices relate to quality? Since quality is better understood when pre-existing features are known, this study explores teachers’ beliefs and their practices to elucidate the educational experiences afforded to our young impressionable learners in selected Grade R classes.

#### **1.4 Rationale for the Study**

My personal motivation for undertaking this study relates to my work experience. I advise Foundation Phase teachers about their pedagogy. This stems from my experience as a Foundation Phase teacher for 20 years, 8 years of experience as the Head of Department and my recent role as a Deputy Principal.

I manage and teach in a very challenging environment. My school is an inner city multicultural school with an enrolment of approximately 1 450 learners, many of whom come from disadvantaged or difficult home backgrounds. Approximately 400 of the learners are immigrants. I deal with dire cases on a regular basis. From the point of pedagogy, I have learnt to develop a multidimensional approach in order to cater for the diverse needs learners in the Foundation Phase

I was curious about what pedagogy might look like in Grade R classes given that my school does not have one. This curiosity led to conversations with Grade R teachers, site visits and research on pedagogy. I captured my understandings through joint authorship of a Grade R publication, namely, *The Thumbs Up Grade R Learners Workbook* and *Teacher’s Guide*. I am, therefore, well placed to conduct this research study given my qualification in a pre-primary phase and my vast experience in the Foundation Phase.

Currently, my school is in the process of making arrangements to open two Grade R classes in 2012. To this end, I visited a feeder Grade R school to observe teaching and learning practices so that I could help with the implementation issues related to Grade R. I watched the teachers teach and thought that it was necessary for me to consider the beliefs and practices of the Grade R teachers so that I can have a deeper understanding of what is

informing their practice, and why Grade R teachers work in the way we do. As a reflective practitioner, I found the exercise of making pedagogy and its rationales visible most valuable. Spending time in Grade R was very inspiring and triggered a desire in me to conduct focused research on the beliefs and practices of Grade R teachers who are the ‘custodians of pedagogy’ in their classes. I felt that this was important to broaden my knowledge before my school opened its doors to Grade R children in 2012.

Secondly, this study has a policy and contextual imperative. Jambunathan & Caulfield (2006, p. 252) highlight that literature from developing countries on early childhood teacher practices in classrooms is limited. Additional studies are necessary to develop understanding of early childhood practices since much of the current literature in early childhood is derived from research done in the West (Smidt, 2007, p. 63; Pence & Marfo, 2008, p. 81). Early Childhood Education (ECE)<sup>7</sup> research has recently been undertaken in South Africa. A study by Phatudi (2007) focused on children's transition from home and pre-school contexts to Grade 1, with the focus of the researcher being on the learners. The National Treasury (2008) conducted a study on the readiness of the South African education system to implement universal access to Grade R. A recent study by Wits School of Education (WSoE) (2009) focused on Grade R-3 classroom practices in Gauteng. The Eastern Cape Department of Education (2010) examined the status and the implementation of Grade R in the province. Another study was conducted by South African Institute for Distance Education (SAIDE) (2010); however only regional discussions took place in KwaZulu-Natal. There is a need for qualitative studies in KwaZulu-Natal which capture the nuances of Grade R practice through an examination of Grade R teachers’ beliefs and practices. This will enable a more informed response on pedagogy in Grade R classrooms in KwaZulu-Natal. My study will attempt to fill this gap in the body of research specific to KwaZulu-Natal.

---

<sup>7</sup> ECE (Early Childhood Education) is the internationally accepted term, while ECD (Early Childhood Development) is the term most widely used in South Africa. These concepts often overlap. For the purpose of this thesis, I will use ECE (except in direct quotations and the titles of documents), with the understanding that it deals mainly with the educational aspect of ECD.

Focusing on pedagogical effectiveness in Grade R classes, this study explores Grade R teachers' conceptions about pedagogy. It highlights what their beliefs are on how to advance children's learning in the classroom, how their actual practice may be influenced by their beliefs and whether their practices are in line with the needs of the National Curriculum and research on effective practice. It also tries to identify the factors that impact or limit teachers' practice. Lobman & Ryan (2007, p. 368) conclude that in spite of a mounting consensus among many researchers and policy advisers about the knowledge and skills required by pre-school teachers, not enough is known about the beliefs and opinions of the teachers themselves. This study is ground breaking as it will provide evidence based research on teacher beliefs and practices. It clarifies whether teachers' beliefs and practices are likely to differ depending on their educational background, their personal experiences, the socio-economic status of the schools where they teach and the availability of resources and support. Brousseau, Book, & Byers (1988) suggest that it is not enough to know what teachers' beliefs are, it is important to investigate whether these beliefs are educationally sound, how they change and what factors influence these changes.

In summary, the rationale for the study is both personal and contextual. The impetus for this chosen area of research stems from my personal curiosity, my professional standing and my quest to make a contribution to increase knowledge for action in Grade R by contributing to growing body of research in the field of ECD.

### **1.5 Research Question**

In the light of the background to the study and the research problem that was briefly sketched, the research question is framed as follows:

What are the beliefs and practices of Grade R teachers within a context of effective pedagogy in selected Grade R/Reception Year classes in the greater Durban area of KwaZulu-Natal?

To facilitate a deep exploration of the research question, three key aspects guided the study in its investigation. The first aspect explored the beliefs of the three Grade R teachers and its compatibility with effective practice. The second foregrounded the nature of practice in the Grade R classrooms and compared it with studies on effective pedagogy. Thirdly, the study focused on reasons for possible changes in beliefs and practice.

Thus, as a qualitative study, the above research question was designed to elicit rich data by exploring, subjective states of the research participants with regard to their beliefs and practices within a context of effective pedagogy.

### **1.6 Purpose and Objectives of the Study**

The main purpose of this study is to use a qualitative approach to explore teacher beliefs and practices within a context of effective pedagogy. A study of this nature will help develop an understanding of several dimensions of pedagogy in Grade R. Teachers' thinking and beliefs, as well as their practices, are critical to understanding the full picture of teaching and learning (Isenberg, 1990, Richardson, 1996). The objectives of this research are:

- to describe Grade R teachers' beliefs;
- to describe teacher practices in Grade R;
- to identify pedagogic challenges that impact on teacher beliefs and practices; and
- to make recommendations based on findings for professional development programmes.

### **1.7 Significance of the Study**

The significance of this study is both theoretical and practical and contributes to our understanding of teachers' thinking and their practice. The pressure for quality improvement in Grade R has increased (Samuel, 2010; UMALUSI, CEPD & Wits Seminar, 2010). Research evidence on the impact of quality Early Childhood Education show, that it has a long-term effect on children's learning, leads to an enhancement of educational achievement, and results in improved social behaviour (Sylva & Wiltshire, 1993).

I view this study as being a valuable source of information that can be used towards improving quality in Grade R classes in several respects. The findings of the study can help in the formulation of policies for improving the conditions of teaching and aid researchers in better understanding of the dynamics of a Grade R classroom. This study provides data for teacher education programmes, and informs policymakers on the different pedagogic approaches used in some Grade R classes in South Africa. It provides significant insights into the beliefs and practices of Grade R teachers. Teachers stand to benefit from an understanding of the beliefs they use to shape their practice. Such introspection invites them

to challenge their beliefs and practices. This study could, stimulate debates on how children learn, add to ideas on effective pedagogy, highlight the importance of teacher qualification and emphasise the relevance of context. The examination of classroom practice would be valuable in highlighting the methodologies that inform teaching and learning in Grade R. There will be more evidence to inform quality provision in Grade R. This would lead to better models of Grade R education that are relevant to the unique context of South Africa.

Scribner (1999) argued that the panacea of reform efforts is professional development but a limited understanding of the depth, breadth and nature of teacher experiences exist. This study serves to add to the broad research on practices in Grade R with regard to the learning environment, teaching strategies, planning and curriculum which frame its implementation. Findings in this study will enable policy makers, the Education Department, higher education Institutes and school administrators to plan appropriate professional development programmes to address this. For the Provincial and National department, I believe that my study could help in shaping teacher development especially in relation to initial and continuing teacher education. Higher Education stands to benefit from ideas on the content of training Grade R teachers as the first grade in the Foundation Phase. I also believe that my study will help researchers. I take a qualitative approach and this provides subjective meanings which are valuable to give nuanced understandings of how context shapes Grade R. Researchers can use my study to invite conversations about teacher beliefs, methodology, context and content of Grade R for further research. My study will also have benefits for pedagogical practice as my school is opening two Grade R classes in 2012 and findings from this research study will be invaluable in guiding us towards effective methodologies that will prepare and shape our future generations to become active, participating citizens of a democratic society.

### **1.8 Overview of Research Design and Methodology**

An exploratory qualitative case study design was employed to collect and analyse data. According to Denzin & Lincoln (2000, p. 3) "... qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of or interpret phenomenon in terms of the meanings people bring to them." My case study selection focused on three female Grade R teachers in their natural contexts, bounded by time, place and activity (Creswell, 2003, p. 15).

A multi-method approach of data collection was followed in this study. The main approaches used to gather the data were semi-structured interviews, observation and document analysis. The data collected was subjected to a thematic analysis across cases (cross-case analysis) (Creswell 2003, p. 15). This study explored the beliefs and practices of selected Grade R teachers. In the final interpretive phase, I report on the three teachers' beliefs and practices in the context of effective pedagogy using some of the studies on effective pedagogy reviewed in Chapter 2 as a basis of comparison. I also report on the challenges and contextual factors uncovered in the study that hamper effective pedagogy in the Grade R classes.

In the discourse of qualitative research, issues of credibility, dependability and transferability are critical when evaluating the research (Lodico, Spaulding & Voegtle, 2006). Credibility refers to whether the participants' perceptions of the phenomenon under study match up with the researcher's portrayal of them in the research report (Lodico et al., 2006). This aspect has been attended to by using research methods that have yielded thick descriptions of the research setting and participants' beliefs and practices within a context of effective pedagogy. Furthermore, multiple sources of data (Lodico et al., 2006) have been used to ensure a broad representation of the beliefs and practices of the participants' within a context of effective pedagogy. Through triangulation, different sources of data have been compared to corroborate the conclusions of the study (see Chapters Five and Six). Furthermore, a clear connection has been made between each finding (theme) and its supporting data extracts (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The themes have been presented in a manner appropriate to the data with all interpretations and conclusions supported by the data as well as literature.

### **1.9 Delimiting the Study**

Delimitation is defined as the boundaries of a study, including why the findings may lack generalisability (Glatthorn & Joyner, 2005). Like all research, this project had limitations. The samples for this study were limited to three Grade R teachers in three public schools in the greater Durban area. One school was situated in the inner city area and two from the surrounding suburbs. The three schools chosen varied from low to middle class socio-economic backgrounds catering for learners from different ethnic backgrounds. The



limitations of the samples chosen are accepted by the researcher and no attempts are made to generalise the results beyond the population stated (Mertens, 1998, p. 206). In addition this study is only limited to female teachers in Grade R. Unfortunately, there were no male Grade R teachers in any of the research sites selected. The research is limited to teachers and did not include the learners. The fieldwork for the study was also conducted in a limited period between May 2011 and June 2011.

## **1.10 Overview of the Study**

### **Chapter 1: Orientation**

This chapter provides a general background to the study. I outline the problem statement and discuss the rationale, purpose and significance of the study. I identify my research question. My research methods and design as well as the limitations of the study are introduced. The chapter ends with an overview of the chapter layout in the study.

### **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

This chapter contains an extensive literature review and places the problem in a broader context. I provide a link between my study and those of others who have researched issues related to ECE. The areas covered include the history and origins of ECE in South Africa, a brief overview of key policies and documents which guide practice in South Africa. Since this study is set in the context of effective pedagogy a review on the concept of pedagogy is undertaken. The definition of pedagogy by Siraj-Blatchford, Sylva, Muttock, Gilden & Bell (2002) discussed in this chapter was found to be most pertinent to this study. I focused on the aspects mentioned by the authors to make sense of pedagogy and practice in Grade R. In order to establish what is considered as effective pedagogy in different contexts, the review focuses on studies around effective pedagogy. Literature from England, Australia and United States are consulted to emphasise what constitutes effective pedagogy in Grade R. In addition, literature on the importance of play pedagogy in early years and research relevant to play-based teaching and learning in Reception classes is discussed. Since the teacher is the ‘custodian’ of pedagogy in the classroom and research has highlighted that teacher beliefs influence classroom practice, the review follows with literature on teacher beliefs and practice.

### Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework

This chapter constitutes the theoretical framework for this study, which focuses on the exploration of teacher beliefs and practices in Grade R classes using a Vygotskian framework. This chapter primarily focuses on aspects of Vygotsky's social constructivist theory that address learning and development. In this chapter the link between learning and development through social and cultural mediation is explored. The interrelationship between thought as an important cultural tool language is highlighted. The role of those who teach the child and the approaches used by them to facilitate learning as described by Vygotsky and his followers is discussed. Vygotsky's theory on the link between play and learning is also explored in this chapter. Even though Vygotsky's theory is of paramount importance in this research study, his theory has been criticised. A brief summary on some criticisms related to his theory is discussed. This chapter ends with a review of some contemporary early childhood curriculum models that advocate play and Vygotsky's social cultural approach to teaching and learning.

### Chapter 4: Research Methodology

This chapter provides a justification for the qualitative approach used for data collection in this study. It discusses in detail the research design and the various methods of data collection. The rationale behind the methodology is explained. The use of semi-structured interviews, classroom observation and document analysis as well a discussion of issues such as sampling, ethical observation, trustworthiness, reliability and validity that guided this case study are highlighted.

### Chapter 5: Findings: Presentation and Discussion

Chapter Five answers the research question. It analyses the data obtained from the transcribed interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis. It presents the findings and provides discussions on the research question about teachers' beliefs and practices in the context of effective pedagogy in Grade R classes. The research findings are presented and discussed with reference to the literature reviewed earlier. Five principal themes central to understanding current Grade R teachers' beliefs and practices emerged. These included the following: learning environment, teaching strategies and classroom management, planning, curriculum and professional development, assessment and finally parental involvement.

## Chapter 6: Conclusion

In this final chapter of the study, I present the main findings of the research, revisit my data, and draw conclusions based on my findings. I summarise the study as a whole and discuss the implications of the study both practically and theoretically. Recommendations towards the improvement of Grade R pedagogic practices and suggestions for further research are made.

### **1.11 Conclusion**

This introductory chapter contextualised the study and identified the research question. It outlined the problem statement and provided a rationale for undertaking this research project. The modus operandi, research parameters as well as the objectives and significance of the study was introduced. An overview of the layout of the study was provided. In the next Chapter, I provide a broad review of supporting literature relevant to this study.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### 2.1 Introduction

The Russian theorist Bakhtin (1984, p. 110) stated:

"truth is not to be found inside the head of an individual person; it is borne between people collectively searching for truth, in the process of their dialogic interaction"<sup>8</sup>

Whilst undertaking this research on teacher beliefs and practices in Grade R classes within a context of effective pedagogy I was reminded of the above quote by Bakhtin as the search for truth in this study continues that process of “dialogic interaction.” Before I proceeded with my own research I conducted a review of current knowledge including substantive findings and theoretical and methodological contributions relevant to this study. This review is used as a “dialogic interaction” as I relate them to my data and present my discussions and findings in Chapter Five and Six. In this chapter, I frame my research interest in relation to the relevant literature available in the field of teacher beliefs and effective pedagogy in Grade R. The focus on teacher beliefs and practices as well as effective pedagogy is foregrounded through the survey of relevant literature.

This literature review is structured into six parts. I begin with an analysis of Grade R provision in South African with reference to key policies and documents which guide practice. Given the focus on effective pedagogy, research on the concept or meaning of pedagogy and practice is discussed. In addition, a review on studies around effective pedagogy the context in which this study is located is undertaken. While there is no formula that will guarantee learning for every learner in every context, there is extensive, well-documented evidence from international studies about the kinds of teaching approaches that consistently have a positive impact on learning. This literature review aims to uncover documentary evidence in national and international research connected to effective pedagogy in Reception classes. Contemporary research has verified that children’s learning outcomes are maximised when interactions between staff and children are based on ‘sustained, shared thinking’ in play-based programs (Fleer, 2010). This review follows with an exploration of literature on play-based learning in Reception year classes. Since the teacher is the

---

<sup>8</sup> Bakhtin (1984 cited in Doolittle, 1999), p. 110

‘custodian’ of pedagogy in the classroom and this research study focuses on the beliefs and practices of the Grade R teacher, the chapter ends with literature on teacher beliefs and practices.

## **2.2 Historical Background**

The following section explores briefly the historical development of Early Childhood Development (ECD) and Early Childhood Education (ECE). It explores the historical background to the adoption of Grade R and the policy documents informing this schooling year in particular. A review on the profile of ECD development in South Africa is necessary in order to understand some of the problems and challenges faced in this sector. One of the longer lasting effects of the inequalities of the apartheid government have been the unequal provision, distribution and quality of ECD provision in South Africa (Porteus, 2004, p. 346). I contextualise Grade R in the past and in the current South African situation using a chronological lens to provide a degree of understanding as how this sector evolved. A study on teacher beliefs and practices in the context of effective pedagogy warrants an investigation into the historical background of Grade R as the history of provision may impact on teachers’ beliefs and practices.

### **2.2.1 The Apartheid Era**

Education for an immeasurable number of South African children before 1994 was greatly neglected. Biersteker & Vale (2003, p. 11) maintained that in the apartheid era, prior to 1994, the government accepted minimal responsibility for the fate of 0 – 6 year old Black, Coloured and Indian children. What little it did provide was mostly beneficial to white learners. Ebrahim (2010), in tracing the historical shifts in early care and education argued that the apartheid government had taken the view that Early Childhood Development was the duty of families and parents and not the responsibility of the state. She noted that in the minimal provision given to young children there was evidence of stimulating education for white children and custodial care for children of other races. The concept of “educare<sup>9</sup>” dominated the field with racial understandings (Ebrahim 2010).

---

<sup>9</sup> The term educare can be defined as the combination of education and care. It is the process through which adults help small children to begin to understand the world around them.

Biersteker (2010, p. 14) noted that pre-primary education in South Africa came onto the agenda in the 1980's. During the 1980's, the De Lange Commission was tasked with the responsibility of finding ways to improve the education system in the country and it was instrumental in highlighting the importance of pre-school education for the disadvantaged communities in an attempt to improve formal education. In 1981, the De Lange Commission Inquiry Report on education in South Africa recommended the fractional 'institutionalisation of pre-basic education' through a bridging period of one to two years in order to provide school readiness for children before commencement of formal education. The 1983 White Paper on the Provision of Education in South Africa endorsed the implementation of a bridging period and recommended that the financing of this intervention be given priority in order to improve the efficiency of the education system (Biersteker 2010, p. 14). In 1987, following a two-year inquiry into the introduction of a bridging period prior to basic education, the Bridging Period Programme (BPP) was accepted by the Department of Education and Training (DET). It was launched as a pilot programme in 1988 and required no additional subsidisation as it took place during the Grade 1 year. After a three week orientation programme on school entry, children were streamed into two groups: one group that needed a ten to twelve week orientation and another group needing longer school readiness training. The first group transferred to Grade 1 work after the ten to twelve weeks, or were transferred to the bridging class if they were still not ready. In large schools these made up different classes but in others they were taught within the same class. While there were numerous inadequacies in the implementation of the BPP and no formal evaluation was undertaken, this school-based intervention involved substantial numbers of children both in DET and the Education Departments in certain 'homelands'<sup>10</sup> (Biersteker, 2010, pp. 14-15).

A study by the Centre for Education Policy Development and the World Bank in 1992 revealed that almost 10% of South African children had access to some form of ECD site, and 3% had access to a subsidised service. While more than one third of white children attended early childhood facilities, only 6% of black children had access. The difference

---

<sup>10</sup> Homeland refers to a state, region, or territory that is closely identified with a particular people or ethnic group. In South Africa it refers to any of the ten regions designated by the South African government in the 1970s as semiautonomous territorial states for the Black population. The Black homelands were dissolved and reincorporated into South Africa by the 1994 constitution.

between expenditure per capita on white and black children exceeded 40 (Padayachee, Atmore, Biersteker, & Evans, 1994, p. 9).

The National Education Policy Investigation (NEPI) investigated policy options for education for the mass democratic movement that was emerging. The NEPI Early Childhood Educare Report (NEPI, 1992) presented options within the school system for 5 to 9 year olds including a pre-primary class for all five year olds. The African National Congress (ANC) Policy Framework for Education and Training Discussion Document drafted in 1994 included the NEPI recommendation of a Reception year for 5 year-olds, as well as a commitment to a policy for child care and development in the community for younger children (Biersteker 2010, p. 15).

### **2.2.2 Post-Apartheid Developments**

In Article 27 of the Convention on the Rights of children, UNICEF (1990) declared that every child has the right to an adequate standard of living for his or her social, mental, spiritual, moral and physical development. Unfortunately, due to decades of racially discriminatory political, educational, social and economic policies the environment in which most children found themselves after 1994 was under-developed and inadequate. The post-apartheid government in South Africa inherited an unequal and divided system of education. The process of curriculum change and reform began immediately after the elections in 1994 as a new Early Childhood policy was needed that would recognise the full spectrum of the population. The advent of democracy brought about the concept of ECD which was considered to be reconciliatory for South African children needing care and education within a private and public service.

At present Grade R falls within the definition of Early Childhood Development (ECD). Several sources define ECD as “an umbrella term which applies to the process by which children from 0 to 9 years grow and thrive: physically, emotionally, mentally, socially, spiritually and morally” (DoE 1995, p. 33; DoE 1996, p. 3; DoE 2001a, p. 9). This definition is an effort to bring together a fragmented field that was based on racial resourcing during the apartheid era. Since 1994, we have seen the evolution of a large number of governmental policies and strategies that have been devised to meet the needs of children in South Africa, especially those who were marginalised during the apartheid era. The most important

documents which had a direct effect on ECD, particularly pertaining to Grade R, are discussed as follows:

The *White Paper on Education and Training* (DoE, 1995) identified ECD especially as a critical component towards contributing to the reconstruction and development of the country. The paper highlighted that the main responsibility for the creation of national educational policy for ECD including the provision of a Grade R (Reception Year) were in the hands of the Education Department together with all stakeholder organisations. The enormous challenge of introducing the policy would be undertaken by Provincial Departments together with accredited training agencies and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). It is important to mention that prior to 1994 the NGO's played a major role in establishing and sustaining the provision of ECD in South Africa in the disadvantaged sector of the population in particular.

*The Interim Policy for Early Childhood Development* (IPECD) (DoE, 1996) published by the Department of Education, provided a broad policy vision for ECD. It was determined that throughout South Africa a Reception Year should be made compulsory on account of its vital importance to the development of a child. The policy suggested a framework for the introduction of Grade R through a national implementation plan. An interim curriculum framework that was seen as a "broad policy document" (DoE, 1996, p. 34) and guidelines for ECD provision that set out the guidelines for learning and teaching were major features of this document. The guiding principles proposed a curriculum framework for ECD (DoE, 1996, pp. 35-38). This related to children, practitioners and ECD programmes. The curriculum rolled out through the *Illustrative Learning Programme for Grade R (Reception) Year* which was published in August 1997 (DoE, 1997). Despite this development Porteus (2004, p. 353) noted that the political climate was not right for this massive change. During this time two research processes, namely the National Pilot Project for ECD and the Nationwide Audit on ECD Provisioning were initiated by the Department of Education.

The *National ECD Pilot Project* (DoE, 2001b) was launched by the Department and implemented in collaboration with NGO's in the sector. The aim of the pilot was to test the ECD interim policy, particularly related to the Reception Year. Some of the objectives of the pilot project (DoE, 2001b, p. 8) were: to test innovation in the field related to accreditation, to



provide policy and subsidy systems, promote outcomes based education (OBE) in Reception Year, to provide training and ensure quality Reception Year education and finally to research the most effectual means of delivering Reception Year education.

The pilot project found that a universal Reception Year was necessary to prepare children for compulsory primary education as well as assist with curbing failure and dropout rates. The project also found that the overall quality of Grade R was too low and needed improvement (DoE, 2001b, pp. 13-14). The following suggestions were put forward by the report to improve the quality of service for Grade R in South Africa (DoE, 2001b, p. 14): training, professionalisation, monitoring, providing resources and effective sites.

The *Nation-wide Audit on ECD provisioning in South Africa* (DoE, 2001a) was commissioned by the DOE to help develop policy and a plan for the delivery of services to our young learners. It was a country-wide research on the status of ECD and included information on learners, educators, training providers and sites. The aim of the *Nation-wide Audit on ECD provisioning* was to provide updated information on the nature and extent of ECD provisioning across the country, and to report on the resources and services available in order to inform planning and policy initiatives (DoE, 2001a, p. 5). The findings revealed the following in the KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) Province in particular:

- School based sites existing in KZN were more than the national average of 17% and a larger number of sites were operating for more than 5 years than the national norm of 63%;
- Sites based in rural areas in the province were significantly more than the national average;
- In terms of basic infrastructure sites in KZN were significantly less developed than the national average;
- Electricity, flushing toilets and piped water existed in only 32% of sites when compared to national figure of 53%;
- Most sites in the province were financially weak with only 41% of parents paying school fees and almost half of the learners contributing less than R25 fees per month;

- The educator learner ratio of 23:1, was higher than 19:1 which was the national average; and
- Most educator profiles (teaching experience, age and qualification) were quite similar to the national profiles. The only concern was about monthly salaries as 56% of the educators received less than R500 a month in comparison to the national figure of 44%.

The results of this audit and the national ECD pilot project informed the development of White Paper 5 in 2001. The *Education White Paper 5* (DoE, 2001c) was passed by the cabinet in May 2001. The main policy issue addressed was the phasing in of a national system of provision for a compulsory Reception Year targeted for children turning five through a combination of smaller independent components and a much larger public scale. A target date of 2010 was specified in *White Paper 5* by which it was expected that all children entering Grade 1 would have participated in an officially recognised Reception Year programme (DoE, 2001c).

The *Draft Revised National Curriculum Statement for grade R-9 (Schools)* (DoE, 2001d) and *the Revised National Curriculum Statements Grade R-9 (schools)* (DoE, 2003) also had a dramatic effect on Grade R. In 2000, the implementation of Curriculum 2005 was reviewed by a ministerial committee. The review committee recommended that the curriculum should be strengthened by simplifying its language and restructuring its design features. The revision of curriculum in 2003 resulted in a drafting of a Revised National Curriculum Statement Grades R-9 (DRNCS). The Draft Revised National Curriculum Statement (DRNCS) for schools from Grade R-9 built on Curriculum 2005 and consisted of a guideline of requirements and expectations at different levels and grades in the school's curriculum (DoE, 2001d). The Foundation Phase Grade R-3 was divided into three learning programmes through which the eight learning areas with their specific field of knowledge had to be obtained, namely: Literacy, Numeracy and Life Skills. The DRNCS was followed by the Revised National Curriculum Statement (RNCS) Grades R-9 which was approved in 2003 (DoE, 2003). Implementation, however, only began in 2004. When the RNCS became policy it replaced the statement of the National Curriculum approved in 1997.

The National Treasury Report (2008, p. 4) recommended the extension of a full scale implementation of Grade R until 2014. However, Biersteker (2008)<sup>11</sup> warned that a focus on access to Grade R without quality could possibly result in inadequate Grade R programmes being implemented. This statement was confirmed by the SAIDE (2010, p. 5) report which found that Grade R implementation has focused more on numerical targets rather than quality programmes. The 2010 Education for All (EFA) Report by the Department of Basic Education (DBE) mentioned:

As provided for in Education White Paper 5 (DoE, 2001), the ECD policy target is that by 2010, all learners who enter Grade 1 should have participated in an accredited Reception year programme. The Department has prioritised the expansion of Grade R provision in public schools for children aged 5 turning 6. Enrolment has increased rapidly in the past decade, but unevenly across provinces. The Department of Education was compelled to acknowledge that resource shortages would prevent the achievement of the goal, and in June 2009 President Jacob Zuma announced the extension of the target date to 2014 (DBE, 2010, p. 8).

Currently, Grade R ought to be implemented from the perspective of the *Foundations for Learning Campaign: 2008 – 2011*. The campaign is a national response to research studies which have highlighted a major concern that South African children lack expected levels of reading writing and counting skills, and are unable to perform specific tasks in Numeracy and Literacy. The *Foundations for Learning Campaign* (DoE, 2008) is a four-year intervention campaign aimed at creating a national focus to better the Numeracy, Writing and Literacy skills of all South African learners. In this campaign the Department of Education gives teachers and schools clear directions on expected levels of performance. Heavy support is provided with regard to teaching in the Foundation Phase (DoE 2008, p. 4). At present curriculum implementation for Grade R is located within the Foundations for Learning. Teachers are given scripted lesson and supportive materials to achieve quality education in Grade R. My study examines teacher beliefs and practices relating to the curriculum implementation and seeks to understand what is framed as effective pedagogy in the selected Grade R contexts. In addition thoughts, concerns and understanding relating to the

---

<sup>11</sup> Biersteker (2008) makes reference to Biersteker's critical response to the 2008 Education For All (EFA) Report of the National Department of Education at the EFA meeting held at the University of the Witwatersrand in 2008.

implementation of the new National Curriculum Assessment Policy Statement<sup>12</sup> (CAPS) in the Foundation Phase in 2012 is also explored in this research study. The Grade R organisation of learning according to the new curriculum is based on principles of integration and play-based learning. It mentions that the teacher should be a proactive mediator rather than a facilitator who must make the most of incidental learning opportunities that arise spontaneously through a range of child-centred activities, such as free-play in the fantasy corner or block construction, and teacher-directed activities such as a story ‘ring’. All these settings provide opportunities for a teacher to purposely intervene and ‘mediate’ incidental learning that promote emergent Literacy and Numeracy. It recommends that a traditional, formal classroom-based learning programme that is tightly structured and ‘basics bound’ should be avoided as it does not optimise Literacy and Numeracy acquisition for the Grade R child (DBE, 2011b, p. 20). Teachers’ belief on whether the imminent change of curriculum will change their practice is explored in this research study.

From a curriculum perspective Grade R is the first year of primary schooling; however, it is differently financed and staffed when compared to the other grades. Since 2001 the government has funded Grade R in two ways. Firstly, provincial governments funded grants to community-based ECD centres on a per-learner basis. Secondly, a direct grant in aid from provincial education departments (PEDs) to school governing bodies which employ the teachers, finances Grade R in public primary schools. Subsidisation of Grade R is poverty targeted but is substantially behind funding for other grades in the same school. In 2005 it was approximately seven times less when compared to a Grade 1 learner (Biersteker, 2010, p. 13). This study examines the impact of funding in Grade R and its relation to teacher beliefs and practices.

This section reviewed the changes in ECD policy in South Africa and has served to highlight the current trajectory of Grade R provision since the advent of democracy and its ensuing rollout towards universal provision by 2014. Prior to exploring teachers beliefs and practices in Grade R an understanding of the context in which it evolved was necessary as it may

---

<sup>12</sup> National Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statements (CAPS) - means the policy documents stipulating the aim, scope, content and assessment for each subject from *Grades R – 12*.

directly or indirectly impact on the beliefs and practices of the teachers and their capacity to provide effective pedagogy.

### **2.3 Defining the concept of Pedagogy and Practice**

Since this study focuses on teacher beliefs and practices in the context of effective pedagogy an understanding of the concept of pedagogy is required as teachers are essentially the ‘custodians’ of pedagogy. Through clarifying and defining pedagogy, the role of the teachers who are the focus of this study is illuminated and a deeper understanding of what is informing practice can be developed. More importantly an understanding of the concept of pedagogy may elucidate why teachers work in particular ways as the strength of practice is supported by what could be called a pedagogical base (Learning and teaching Scotland, 2005, p. 3).

According to Mortimore (1999) pedagogy is a contested term which is characterised by changing connotations and pressures. Pedagogy is defined by Watkins & Mortimore (1999, p.3) as “any conscious activity by one person designed to enhance the learning of another.” This definition echoes the complex and vast nature of pedagogy, and highlights the difficulty in attempting to carefully sum up a teachers method of teaching, managing and supporting learning in vibrant classroom environments. Watkins & Mortimore (1999) draw attention to some components of pedagogy that is important to consider. Pedagogy can be used to explain the *how* of teaching - if we presume that the curriculum depicts the *what* i.e. the content of teaching. Hence, pedagogy is frequently referred to as the process that this content is communicated to learners. Pedagogy can be understood as the actions used by a teacher in order to achieve the curriculum goals (Learning and teaching Scotland, 2005, p. 9). The concept of pedagogy is complex even when observing highly experienced teachers work as it is not possible to effortlessly strip it down to well recognised component parts that can be applied to all learning environments. Teachers use varied approaches and methods at different intervals in a variety of learning contexts, with diverse groups of learners. At times teachers may plan to do something and suddenly make changes to those plans, based on a judgment, in order to achieve their learning goals (Learning and teaching Scotland, 2005, p. 10).

Even though pedagogy is sometimes viewed as a nebulous concept, it is basically an amalgamation of skills needed for effective teaching (Chapuis, 2003). Traditional definitions of pedagogy describe the concept as the art/practice or the science/theory of teaching that improves the social and intellectual development of learners. More specifically, new research is defining pedagogy as “a highly complex blend of theoretical understanding and practical skill” (Lovat, 2003, p. 11).

In the UK government funded study of pedagogical effectiveness in early learning (SPEEL) project (Moyles, Adams & Musgrove, 2002) pedagogy is defined as:

. . . both the behaviour of teaching and being able to talk about and reflect on teaching. Pedagogy encompasses both what practitioners actually DO and THINK and the principles, theories, perceptions and challenges that inform and shape it. It connects the relatively self-contained act of teaching and being an early years educator, with personal cultural and community values . . . curriculum structures and external influences. Pedagogy in the early years operates from a shared frame of reference . . . between the practitioner, the young children and his/her family (2002, p. 5).

In addition, Stewart & Pugh (2007, p. 9) defined pedagogy as “the understanding of how children learn and develop, and the practices through which we can enhance that process.” It is rooted in values and beliefs about what we want for children, and supported by knowledge, theory and experience (Stewart & Pugh, 2007). Finally another definition of pedagogy used by Siraj-Blatchford, Sylva, Muttock, Gilden & Bell (2002) for early childhood is as follows:

Pedagogy refers to that set of instructional techniques and strategies which enable learning to take place and provide opportunities for the acquisition of knowledge, skills, attitudes and dispositions within a particular social and material context. It refers to the interactive processes between teacher and learner and to the learning environment (which includes the concrete learning environment, the family and community (p. 28).

This comprehensive definition encompasses the learning environment, interactions, and involvement with the community and family. For this study, I found the above definition by Siraj-Blatchford et al. to be most pertinent. I focused on the aspects mentioned by the authors to make sense of pedagogy and practice in Grade R. I use the above definition as a basis of comparison in Chapter Five and Six when documenting the beliefs and practices of the Grade R teachers in this study.

Understanding the definition of “practice” is valuable in this study as the researcher observes the ‘practice’ of teachers in order to gain insight into teaching and learning in the Grade R classroom. ‘Practice’ according to Moyles et al. (2002, p. 5) is defined as “all the pedagogue

does within the teaching and learning context on a daily, weekly and longer term basis . . . Practice includes planning, evaluating and assessing children’s play and other learning experiences both indoors and outdoors.” In addition, Kostelnik, Soderman & Whiren (2004, p. 59) defined practice as the “use of new behaviour or knowledge repeatedly and in a variety of ways.”

An understanding of the definition of pedagogy and practice in this study helps the researcher look critically at the way in which Grade R education unfolds in practice through the pedagogical beliefs held by the selected Grade R teachers. In the next section, I review some empirical literature on effective pedagogy in early years.

#### **2.4. Studies on Effective Pedagogy in Early Years**

In this section, I look at some research studies on classroom practice that show an enhancement on children’s learning in the early years. Literature from England, Australia and United States are consulted to emphasise what constitutes effective pedagogy in Grade R. Although this review derives from a predominantly Western cultural context, which is different from the current study context, many authors have acknowledged that ideologies originating from the West have influenced teacher training and curriculum development in developing countries (Prochner & Kabiru, 2008; Pence & Marfo, 2008).

In order to recognise what type of pedagogy is effective in the early years major studies on pedagogical effectiveness were conducted in the UK. Siraj-Blatchford et al. (2002) conducted the *Researching Effective Pedagogy in the Early Years* (REPEY) project and Sylva, Melhuish, Sammons, Siraj-Blatchford, & Taggart (2004) conducted the *Effective Provision of Pre-school Education* (EPPE) project and together they surveyed the progress of 3 000 learners ranging from three to seven years as they moved through pre-school centres and into the first years of school. In addition, Moyles, et al., (2002) examined the beliefs and practices of quality teachers in the *Study of Pedagogical Effectiveness in Early Learning* (SPEEL) project. The data from these projects attempt to clarify what constitutes effective pedagogy in the early years. The SPEEL study was commissioned alongside the REPEY project. In what follows, I look at the major findings in each of the studies.

In the context of my study the results from the EPPE project regarding the impact of teachers and the methods in which teachers worked with children are very important. The EPPE study investigated pre-schools where children attained good or excellent outcomes. Environments that are encouraging, comfortable and friendly with an inviting appearance are some of the features of effective pre-schools identified in the EPPE study. Pre-schools in this study had reasonably adequate resources; granting some had purpose-built unrestricted spaces while others were inhibited by the surroundings they were in (Siraj-Blatchford, Sylva, Taggart, Melhuish, Sammons, & Elliot, 2003). Results from this study showed that learning and teaching were highly effective in contexts where practice was characterised by:

- Cognitive interactions and ‘sustained shared thinking’ between adult and child;
- Comprehensive understanding of knowledge and of subject matter by the teacher;
- The constant use of questioning techniques in the context of children’s play by adults;
- A combination of learning via free play and group work was provided for children and initiated by staff. Free play was considered important as it enabled learners to explore their own interests and assume responsibility for their own learning. In quality pre-school contexts, learners spent approximately two thirds of their time in child-initiated activities;
- The Provision of learning opportunities was specifically designed to cater for the needs of individuals and groups of learners, such as English second language speakers;
- Policies on discipline and behaviour were based on working through conflicts;
- The pedagogic contexts inspired the development of children; and
- Involvement from the home in learning activities was essential (Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2003, p. 4).

In addition to identifying specific aspects of pedagogy and the environment in quality pre-schools, findings from the EPPE project show that learners from disadvantaged backgrounds achieved better outcomes in pre-schools in which there was a mixture of learners from varied socio-economic backgrounds (Sylva, Melhuish, Sammons, Siraj-Blatchford, & Taggart, 2009). Quality pre-schools that achieved higher academic outcomes for learners (mostly in Mathematics and Reading by age six) offered a balanced curriculum, that emphasised Mathematics, Literacy, Science/Environment, and catered for learners with varied cultural



backgrounds, abilities, interests and genders (Sylva et al., 2004). The EPPE project also highlighted that effective leadership in terms of planning and curriculum, combined with a low staff turnover, opportunities for professional development, and a supportive and child centred philosophy, were all features of effectiveness (Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2003).

A more detailed examination of the kind of pedagogy, practice and curriculum that enhances intellectual and social/behavioural development was carried out in the *Researching Effective Pedagogy in the Early Years (REPEY)* project (Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2002). From their case studies of effective settings identified by EPPE the REPEY team concluded that:

- Contexts that showed social and cognitive development as complimentary resulted in better outcomes;
- Interactions where adults and children engaged in ‘sustained shared thinking’ frequently were characterised as more effective settings;
- Effective teachers need to have an in depth understanding of the content of curriculum areas in order to support children’s learning;
- Quality teachers motivate learners to engage with cognitive challenge and have a selection of pedagogical interactions (including direct instruction) that they use at appropriate times;
- Differentiation of the curriculum, provision of tasks that cater for the needs of children and match their abilities and the use of formative assessment distinguished effective settings; and
- In the most effective settings a balance between child initiated and adult initiated learning existed.

Significant points from this research are the critical role of the teachers in creating a balance between adult-led and child-initiated tasks, the importance of engaging in ‘sustained shared thinking’ and the different kinds of pedagogic interactions that guide but not govern children’s thinking were considered during this research project.

A number of features of effective pedagogy were found in both the EPPE and REPEY projects. It is important to note that, no one or specific effective pedagogy was found. Instead, it was found that:

The effective pedagogue orchestrates learning by making interventions (scaffolding, discussing, monitoring, allocating tasks) which are sensitive to the curriculum concept or skill being 'taught', taking into account the child's 'zone of proximal development' (Siraj-Blatchford & Sylva, 2004, p. 720).

The code of practice underpinning effective pedagogy is connected to the expectations and beliefs of teachers: "Effective pedagogy is based on informed knowledge and theories of early childhood development, education and care, including management and organisational factors" (Moyles et al., 2002, p. 119). According to the SPEEL project critical to quality pedagogy is the process in which principles are established and the process in which understanding of children's learning and developmental theories are applied to practice. This process is informed by teachers' understandings values, and beliefs. Teachers' commitment, passions and beliefs are manifested through the principles that inform their practice and the manner in which they are able to validate how children learn more effectively (Moyles et al., 2002, p. 120). The professional element of quality pedagogy requires teachers to frequently engage in reflection about their practice. Within this component, professional thinking is described by Moyles et al. (2002, p. 120) as "the conscious process of interpretation and reflection and their application to practice." The SPEEL report (Moyles et al., 2002) revealed that early childhood teachers were a lot more at ease explaining what they did (their practice), than they were at explaining exactly what guided their interactions. The fact that they were unable to engage in a discussion on pedagogy was considered as a limitation to promoting effective pedagogy. Frequent reflective dialogue and constant discussion about their beliefs on pedagogy, was required in this project in order to develop an understanding of effective pedagogy (Dockett, Perry, Campbell, Hard, Kearney, & Taffe, 2007, p. 25). In addition a reflection on pedagogy helped teachers to recognise that early childhood pedagogy is complicated, therefore, measures of 'effectiveness' must focus largely on pedagogy as a whole, instead of one specific aspect. They identified that the language of teaching and pedagogy was unclear and lacked understanding by early childhood teachers. The SPEEL project highlighted that quality pedagogical practices are subject to the ethos of a

management and organisation that values reflection and enables change. It also revealed that reflection and verbalisation of practice among teachers are essential for the improvement of pedagogical skills and understanding of pedagogy (Dockett et al., 2007, p. 25).

One of the main outcomes of the SPEEL (Moyles et al., 2002) project was a Framework of Effective Pedagogy which specified 129 significant statements using three headings: *Practice* (planning learning circumstances, and interactions); *Professionalism* (thinking, qualities and knowledge) and *Principles* (roles, teaching and learning and entitlements). The SPEEL project showed that quality educators are self-evaluative, reflective, professionals that are able to examine their practice. Findings from the SPEEL project are significant in this research on teacher beliefs and practices in Grade R classes. This research study also looked at teachers' beliefs or principles and their practices to identify the types of developmental theories applied and to highlight teachers' beliefs on how children learn best. The challenges that teachers encounter, are linked to their usage of content knowledge, their pedagogic skills, their own understanding of practice and, most important of all, their anxiousness for and understanding of their learners to ensure that the most suitable teaching and learning experiences are provided (Moyles et al., 2002).

Whilst these studies hone in on to the early years specifically, we need to look at it more broadly. If children are subjected to effective practice in the early years then there are short and long term benefits. The High/Scope Perry Pre-school Study in the US beginning in 1962 was a scientific experiment identifying the effects of a pre-school education programme of high quality on children from poverty stricken backgrounds. The study showed how pre-school experience shaped participants' accomplishments at age 40. Beginning with pre-school experience and children's pre-programme academic performance, the study traced cause-effect links to children's post programme academic performance such as their schooling successes, dedication to schooling, educational achievement and their earnings during adulthood. The major conclusion of the High/Scope Perry Pre-school research study conducted in the late 1960s was that effective pre-school programs impact on the social and intellectual development, schooling performance, economic success and lower criminal involvement of children living in poverty. This study reinforced that the long-term effects are lifetime effects (Schweinhart, Montie, Xiang, Barnett, Belfield, & Nores, 2005). The

functions of the teacher in High/Scope programs include involvement in authentic dialogue and positive interactions with children, as well as promoting children's engagement in reflection and planning. High/Scope programs highlight pedagogy that enables children to interact with a sequence of important experiences across the areas of logical reasoning creative expression; music and movement; literacy and language; social relations and initiative (Dockett, et al., 2007, p. 20).

Stephen (2006) noted that "the kinds of educational experiences offered to children reflect the expectations held by society in general and practitioners and policy makers in particular about appropriate outcomes and goals" (p. 5). Research in Australia on productive pedagogies was embarked upon by Hayes, Mills, Christie, & Lingard (2006) in an attempt to improve the learning outcomes of all learners. Drawing on the Queensland School Reform Longitudinal Study (QSRLS), productive pedagogies presented a framework for quality teaching. According to Hayes and her co-authors, improved social and intellectual outcomes for all learners are connected to productive pedagogic approaches. Productive pedagogies are entrenched within very socially encouraging classrooms; they identify differences, are intellectually challenging, and are strongly linked to the world outside the classroom (Hayes et al., 2006). This study looked at Grade R teachers' beliefs and practices in their classrooms to find similarities in beliefs that relate to productive pedagogies and to determine what aspects of the Grade R teacher's classroom practice make a difference to children's learning.

Teachers' beliefs often determine children's educational experiences (Aubrey, 1997). Teachers are responsible for developing and maintaining a classroom environment that supports children as they engage with learning to ensure good practice. Good practice is related closely to how the developmental domains (physical, social, emotional and cognitive) of the children are supported. In using a Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP) curriculum approach, teachers are expected to have a sound knowledge of child development and learning and an understanding of children's individual needs and interests and their socio-cultural backgrounds (Gestwicki, 2007). The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC, 1997, p. 10) defined DAP as an approach to education that guides teachers in their everyday practice. The central principles of DAP are: uniqueness of the child, active engagement, involvement with peers and adults, authenticated experiences, suitable learning activities, holistic curriculum, deep seated motivation and applicable

assessment (Vander Wilt & Monroe, 1998). This approach also advocates play as a vehicle for learning. It is believed that through play children acquire problem solving, language, physical and social skills. Teachers support children through activity based learning both indoors and outdoors. Good practice is one that structures learning environments to teach through play (NAEYC, 1997). In the Foundation Stage curriculum documents in England (Qualifications & Curriculum Authority (QCA), 2000) the role of a teacher in a play-based classroom is to plan challenging learning environments, support children through planned activities, extend and support spontaneous play, extend and develop language and communication, assess learning through play and to ensure continuity and progression. Davin & Van Staden (2005, pp. 8 & 25) stated that a Grade R curriculum should be well planned, enjoyable, informal, relevant to the learners' life world, and should integrate the different learning areas in developmentally appropriate activities.

In summary, across all the research studies discussed, the importance of sustained positive interactions between children and adults and the value of play pedagogy have been emphasised. Play has an extensive research history that extends back to the work of Rousseau, Locke, Plato, Aristotle, Quintilian, Luther, Comenius, and Pestalozzi as they assigned great value to children's play and motivated for its incorporation into education. Research and data all point to the significance of play in children's learning and development throughout all cultures (Shipley, 2008). In the next section of this review I present literature of some of the research relevant to play based teaching and learning in Reception classes.

## **2.5 Literature on Play and its impact on Learning**

A practice frequently used in the Early Childhood Education is 'learning through play'. Play-based learning is defined in the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) of Australia as an environment for learning through which learners shape and make sense of the world, through interacting with people, representations and objects (DEEWR, 2009, p. 46). The possibility of play being a vital part in children's learning has been illustrated by Wood & Attfield (1996, p. 153):

Play acts as an integrating mechanism that enables children to draw on experiences, represent them in different ways, make connections, explore possibilities, and create sense and meaning. It integrates cognitive processes and skills that assist in learning. Some of these develop spontaneously, others have to be learnt consciously in order to make learning more efficient.

Smidt (2009, p. 117) stated that play is an extremely complex and fascinating phenomenon and not something that can be easily dismissed as fun. It is perceived as serious business involving children in taking steps to move from dependence to interdependence. Decades of research on the value of play show strong links between social, cognitive, physical, creative and language development (Simdt, 2009). According to researcher Smilansky (1990, p. 35), children who display high capacities for social make believe play also show greater imagination, lesser aggression, and a better skill in using language for communication and understanding others. Research suggests that play performs a pivotal role in developing this behavioural flexibility and responsiveness to environments. The benefit of play, relative to other strategies, is that the behaviours generated through playing can be more innovative and allow for further practice (Pellegrini, Dupuis, & Smith, 2007, p. 266).

As early as the 1970s, research in Germany highlighted that by Grade Four; learners who had attended play-based kindergartens outshone those from academic based kindergartens in creative, mental, physical, emotional and social development. The study compared 50 play oriented kindergartens with 50 academically oriented ones. The findings were particularly salient among lower-income children, who notably benefited from the play-based approach. The findings were so convincing that Germany made all its kindergartens return to being play-based (Der Spiegel, 1997, pp. 89-90). In addition, Marcon's (1999) research assessed three different curriculum approaches: a combined 'play-based and academic' curriculum, an 'academically oriented' curriculum, and a 'play based' curriculum. Her research showed significantly higher long term and short term gains for children who participated in a 'play-based' early childhood programme. Play contexts enriched with culturally appropriate resources often give learners an opportunity to discover concepts and processes, and acquire a positive outlook to learning. It inspires discovery, socialisation, risk taking, and active involvement in learning. Through play children can explore and reflect on interests and issues relevant to their lives (Wilks, Nyland, Chancellor, & Elliot, 2008, p. 13).

Results from Siraj-Blatchford and Sylva's (2002) study in the UK suggested that the most quality contexts ensured that both freely chosen, but highly instructive play activities and teacher-initiated group tasks were provided. In addition, Wood & Bennett's research on the continuity of learning from Nursery, Reception and Year 1 classes showed evidence of a move from mostly learner-centred teaching approaches in Nursery, towards curriculum orientated approaches in Reception and Year 1. Findings from their study showed less continuity and a decrease in play, on account of the increased pressures from the Literacy and Numeracy Strategies as well as an increase in the pace and sequence of content in the curriculum (Wood & Bennett, 2000, p. 635-647).

Despite the many research findings that endorse play, a constant picture that frequently emerges from research is related to problematic nature of play in practice. Bennett, Wood, & Rogers (1997) provided reasons why teaching and learning via play is perceived as problematic. The authors conducted a study of nine Reception class teachers' beliefs of play and its link to classroom practice. The study proved that even though the teachers ensured that play was integrated in the curriculum, the desired learning outcomes were in some instances not attained. Several challenges were specified that affected teachers' beliefs and practice which included: the national curriculum framework; expectations of parents; the timetable of the school; insufficient space and resources; educator: child ratios, and the learner's abilities to benefit from play-orientated activities. Other studies have also shown that in some Reception classes play was often used as a time filler where educators in general held minimal expectations of it; it lacked purpose or cognitive challenge; pupil involvement was wanting, there was a lack of monitoring by educators, and opportunities to challenge and extend thinking were missed (Bennett & Kell, 1989).

Research results, from the EPPE (Sylva et al., 2004), REPEY (Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2002) and SPEEL (Moyle et al., 2002) studies, have queried both the quality and value of the play activities that young children experience and their associated learning outcomes. Within the SPEEL project (Moyle et al., 2002); early childhood educators voiced beliefs about the value of play in children's learning. However, these very educators also pointed out that many children did not undergo high levels of intellectual challenge when involved in free play in their own learning environments (Dockett et al., 2007, p. 30). The British Educational Research Association Early Years Special Interest Group (BERA-SIG) conducted a research

study on pedagogy, curriculum and adult roles, training and professionalism in 2003. The BERA-SIG research report (2003, p. 16) argued that “research evidence for the efficacy of play is mixed... whilst play-based learning appears to hold much promise, implementing a play-based pedagogy continues to present numerous challenges to practitioners.” Instead of choosing to abandon play early in childhood pedagogy, these researchers suggest that a renewed pedagogy of play should be created, that is characterised by suitable activities that are planned purposefully to ensure that it is challenging and meaningful for children. Teachers are encouraged to interact with their children and to ensure that they provide a highly resourced learning context in which learners can thrive and grow. Children should be given opportunities to plan and develop their own activities, and must be allowed sufficient time to complete their tasks (BERA-SIG, 2003, p. 16). For this possibility to be realised, Siraj-Blatchford & Sylva (2004) suggested that teachers should assume a much more proactive than reactive role. Consistent with the socio-cultural and situated approaches to learning, this theory indicates that teachers should be responsible for providing the necessary support and scaffolding needed to ensure that children are motivated to co-construct new knowledge, skills and understandings (Dockett et al., 2007, p. 30).

In summary to elevate the position of play and learning within early childhood curriculum, teachers need to recognise the different ways in which play develops and becomes increasingly complex. Teachers need be specific in their expectations about play and learning. In addition educators must recognise that many children will advance further with direction and encouragement, rather than a laissez-faire environment (Dockett, et al., 2007, p. 31). This research study focuses on teacher beliefs and practices in the context of effective pedagogy in Grade R classes. Literature on teacher beliefs and practices is presented in the final part of this review.

## **2.6 Exploring Literature on Teacher Beliefs and Practices**

This study is an exploration of teacher beliefs and practices in the context of effective pedagogy hence, this section of the review presents a definition and understanding of teacher beliefs and a summary of research findings on teachers’ beliefs and practices as they relate to the currently held view of effective pedagogy.



Teacher beliefs about how children learn are generally thought to impact on how teachers organise their environment for teaching, learning, and developing children's knowledge. An understanding of teacher beliefs and practices is important as the core of successful classroom practice depends on the interaction between the teacher and the learner (Aubrey, 1997; Aubrey, David, Godfrey & Thompson, 2000). According to Hattie (2003), the most significant in-school factor that impacts on children's interactions and achievements is linked to teacher quality. He analysed approximately half a million research studies on the impact of varied educational approaches and interventions on learner achievement and found that teaching has a measurable impact of approximately 30% to 59% on a learners' cognitive, emotional, behavioural and social outcomes. This shows that the influence of the teacher is critical and is far more important than other characteristics such as curriculum guidelines, school organisation and resources. Clark & Peterson (1986, p. 255) stated "teacher behaviour is substantially influenced and even determined by teachers' thought processes." An in depth analysis of teacher beliefs opens a window through which we can observe teachers' practices, decision-making, and sometimes, the quality of instructional approach used (Nespor, 1987; Pajares, 1992). Therefore, a deeper understanding of teachers' educational beliefs is vital to improve and guide teaching practices. The content knowledge and ability to use a number of pedagogical practices and the assumptions teachers have of learners and learning, influences teaching. Keys & Bryan (2001, p. 635) maintained that teachers are active creators who make instructional decisions based on a complex system of beliefs and knowledge.

Beliefs are described as personal constructs that postulate an understanding of a teacher's practice (Richardson, 1996). Beliefs are connected to self-identity and as such are strongly held and deeply embedded within the individual. Hedges & Cullen (2005, p. 2) maintained that "teachers' beliefs impact on the curriculum and pedagogy offered to children and mediate between teachers' knowledge and performance." Beliefs are personal, complex, likely to be self-fulfilling and not always internally consistent. Most significantly, beliefs are unlikely to change unless they are challenged. Rimm-Kaufman, Storm, Sawyer, Pianta, & LaParo (2006, p. 143) identified the following seven aspects of teacher beliefs:

- Beliefs are grounded on judgment, evaluation, and values and do not need much evidence to support them;

- They influence the behaviour, thoughts, meanings and decisions made in the classroom;
- Beliefs may sometimes be unconscious as the possessor of the beliefs may be unaware of effects it may have on their behaviour;
- They may vary between the professional and social life of teachers encompassing both cultural and personal sources of knowledge;
- They become more personal and deeper as classroom involvement and skills grows;
- Teacher beliefs may hinder efforts to implement change in classroom practice, and
- Teacher beliefs are value-laden and can guide thinking and action.

A number of research studies have documented findings of teachers' beliefs and their relevance to practice. These include studies on beliefs and child-centred play-based approaches (Lee, 2006, Pui-Wah & Stimpson, 2004) and the consistency of beliefs and practices (Wang et al., 2008). In addition, studies exist that document factors shaping beliefs and practices (Parker & Neuharth-Pritchett, 2006). Developing an understanding of how teachers' knowledge, beliefs, and attitudes influence their classroom practice leads to greater understanding of the teaching process (Beswick, Swabey & Andrew, 2008). Some researchers argue that the belief–practice domain may differ for teachers with varied professional training and experiences (Peters & Sutton, 1984; Rosenthal, 1991).

A recent Qualitative Study of Early Childhood Educators' Beliefs about Key Classroom Experiences by Lara-Cinisomo, Fuligni, Daugherty, Howes, & Karoly (2009) was conducted in the United States. The focus of the study was to discover early childhood educators' beliefs on the approach needed to prepare children who were getting ready for kindergarten. The study comprised of 11 focus groups with participants from family child care programs, public centre-based programs and private centre-based programmes. Findings from the study revealed three kinds of pre-school classroom experiences that teachers thought were essential when working with children preparing for kindergarten. They were the children's learning environment, the types of learning opportunities provided and teacher-child interactions. Each of these components was made up of a number of factors. However, although the teachers from the three different types of early education programmes suggested these dimensions, there was a significant variation among the factors that made up each

component, with differences within and between each centre type. Results indicated that educators in pre-school and kindergarten settings strongly sanction the importance of a variety of school preparation experiences for young children, but there were differences among educators in their beliefs about appropriate approaches to guiding the education of young children (Lara-Cinisomo, et al., 2009).

In her journal, *Pre-school Teachers' Shared Beliefs about Appropriate Pedagogy for 4-Year-Olds*, Lee (2006) stated that existing literature studies on early childhood teachers' beliefs, suggests that pre-school teachers appeared to hold ECE's time honoured tradition that prioritises the physical, social and emotional development of children above academic learning. These can also be categorised as Developmentally Appropriate Practices (Lee, 2006, p. 439). Lee explored 18 pre-school teachers' beliefs about appropriate pedagogy for four-year-olds, using teacher-directed and child-centred video-clips to explore teachers' beliefs. Lee (2006, p. 439) concluded that all the participating teachers fully endorsed the belief that the curriculum must draw from children's interests, and that there is a need to treat each child as an individual in the learning process. All the teachers in the study subscribed to child related practices rather than teacher-directed practices. These findings were further substantiated with those of Parker & Neuharth-Pritchett (2006), who found that even though teachers in their study were under enormous pressure to use teacher-directed approaches, they still subscribed to child-centred pedagogy. Their study explored 34 kindergarten teachers' beliefs about their instructional practices and concluded that kindergarten has become increasingly formal and academic. Parker & Neuharth-Pritchett (2006, p. 71) noted that there seemed to be two types of pressure experienced by the teachers, i.e. overt and self-imposed pressure. Overt pressure appeared to originate from external forces such as preparation for the next grade, while the self-imposed pressure related to teachers' own reasons for using teacher-directed approaches, for example the teacher believed that this will lead to better classroom control. Another overt or external pressure experienced by teachers was the expectation of principals or directors of schools which was explored in the research by Wang et al. (2008).

Wang et al. (2008) explored the consistency of Chinese pre-school teachers' beliefs, and compared them with their American pre-school teachers. 296 Chinese teachers and 146

American teachers completed the Teacher Beliefs Scale and supplied information on their backgrounds. The findings showed consistent links between pre-school teachers' beliefs and their self-reported practices (Wang et al., 2008, p. 243). Teachers in both China and America actually held similar beliefs about child-related curriculum, teacher-directed instruction, academic skills and an integrated curriculum, but the extent to which they practised particular beliefs differed. American teachers' beliefs were less formal and structured and more orientated towards child initiated instruction whereas their Chinese counterparts were more prone to teacher-directed instruction. Play orientated pedagogy was used as an approach by the American teachers in the study. In addition, teacher beliefs on play pedagogy which is considered necessary in effective practice in the early years, was highlighted in a qualitative study by Pui-Wah & Stimpson (2004) in Hong Kong. He explored six kindergarten teachers' understanding of processes in implementing play and teaching approaches used by them. The researcher's findings revealed that teachers' own rigid thinking prevented them from including play in learning. Teachers in their study had a dichotomised concept of play and learning. Their findings showed that there might be preconceived beliefs about child-centred activities that hinder teachers from embracing them. Even though some teachers in the study expressed a desire to use play in their teaching, they failed to do so due to their fear of certain undesirable consequences (Pui-Wah & Stimpson, 2004).

It is important to understand the complex relationships between pedagogical beliefs and how the teaching contexts influence the enactment of these beliefs in selected Grade R classes. Using the literature discussed on beliefs and practices as a lens this study attempts to answer the research question: What are the beliefs and practices of Grade R teachers within a context of effective pedagogy in selected Grade R/Reception Year classes in the greater Durban area of KwaZulu-Natal?

## **2.7 Conclusion**

In summary this chapter began by outlining the broad historical background of Grade R in South Africa. Such insights are necessary in order to understand why Grade R functions in the way it currently does. Since this study is located in the context of effective pedagogy, this review discussed definitions of pedagogy and presented research findings on effective

pedagogical practices. In addition, the role and place of play as well the challenges experienced when implementing play within effective pedagogy, has been highlighted. The definition of the pedagogy and practice, the research findings of studies on effective classroom practice, and the use of play in early years teaching will be used as my lens in this research study as I explore the nature of teacher beliefs and practices three Grade R classrooms. Literature on teacher beliefs and practices highlight inconsistencies and similarities between them. The complexity of teaching and the management of learning can lead to tensions between practice and beliefs because teachers have to simultaneously manage children in the classroom, undertake the process of teaching and learning, and meet the demands of the wider school environment. Significant demands are made of teachers within their environment relating to their teaching pedagogy, which need to be balanced within the classroom situation (Aubrey, 1997). In the next chapter, I look at the theoretical framework that guides this study.

## **Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework**

### **3.1 Introduction**

“Education must be orientated not towards the yesterday of a child's development, but towards its tomorrow” (Vygotsky, 1987, p. 211)

This research study is largely informed by the seminal ideas of Lev Vygotsky. Vygotsky's statement that education must be geared towards the tomorrow of a child's development is significant in this study since Early Childhood Education is of paramount importance if we expect to prepare young children to become active, responsible, successful and effective citizens for the 21st century. This Russian philosopher and psychologist is frequently linked with the social constructivist theory. His theory is regarded by a number of researchers and educationalists as essential for instructional enhancement, classroom change and redevelopment (Goldfarb, 2000; Shambaugh & Magliaro, 2001). Vygotsky's emphasis on the social, cultural, and contextual influences on cognitive development is what makes him different from other important figures in educational psychology. His theory views education as an on-going process and not a product (Goldfarb, 2000; Shambaugh & Magliaro, 2001). According to Vygotsky various processes and developmental outcomes that were previously thought of as occurring 'naturally' or 'spontaneously' were in actual fact influenced or 'constructed' by children's own learning. Hence, learning is constructed by the historical and social context in which it emerges. This double emphasis on children's active involvement in their own mental development and on the role of the social context determines, Vygotsky's theory commonly described as social constructivism (Bodrova & Leong, 2001, p. 9). Since education occurs in a social milieu Vygotsky's theory is critical in this research study. This study primarily focused on aspects of Vygotsky's theory that addressed learning and development as he linked these two processes in a way that has never been considered before (Bodrova & Leong, 2001, p. 9). Vygotsky's general theory of cognitive development was used as a framework for this research study, as it has implications for teaching and learning in contemporary times (Shambaugh & Magliaro, 2001). It explored teacher beliefs and practices in the context of effective pedagogy in Grade R classrooms using a Vygotskian framework.

In the following sections, the link between learning and development through social and cultural mediation is explored. The interrelationship between thought and an important cultural tool language is highlighted. The role of those who teach the child and the

approaches used by them to facilitate learning as described by Vygotsky and his followers is discussed. Since play is recognised for the important contribution it makes to early years education, Vygotsky's theory on the link between play and learning is also explored in this chapter. However, although Vygotsky's theory is of paramount importance in this research study, his theory on cognitive development has several critics. A brief summary on criticisms linked to his theory are discussed. This chapter ends with a review of two contemporary early childhood curriculum models that advocate play and Vygotsky's social cultural approach to teaching and learning.

### **3.2 Learning Precedes Development**

As mentioned in the introduction a fundamental idea underpinning Vygotsky's thoughts on development is that a complex dynamic relationship exists between development and learning, where learning guides and stimulates development, and thus development is dependent on the social learning environment (Dolya & Palmer, 2004, p. 2). He believed that "learning always preceded development, and that the role of learning was especially great in sensitive periods" (Vygotsky, 1983, p. 83). These sensitive periods, are time periods when a child is most sensitive to certain influences and external factors, and when certain mental processes are being formed at an especially effective rate in the child (Vygotsky, 1983). These sensitive periods do not happen in a prescribed universal sequence or age period, but are dependent on socio-historical and cultural factors (Chaiklin, 2003). Thus, the role of the environment is not only the condition in which the development of the child takes place, but is also a source of development (Vygotsky, 1983).

Teachers' beliefs and practices regarding the importance of the environment in teaching and learning were explored in this research study. The kind of learning that leads to change in development was portrayed by Vygotsky as the context in which children obtain particular cultural tools given to them by more experienced members of society. The more experienced members of society mentioned by Vygotsky refer to the Grade R teachers in this study. Their beliefs and practices on learning and development through the use of cultural tools were examined. The use of cultural tools facilitates the acquisition of higher mental functions through mediated behaviours that take different forms depending on the specific cultural context (Bodrova & Leong, 2001, p. 9). The research samples chosen for this study represent diverse cultural contexts which require different forms of 'mediated behaviours' from the

teachers. The beliefs and practices of the teachers and their responses to the cultural diversity in their schools were also explored. The process of cultural mediation leading to the development of higher mental functions is discussed more broadly in the next section.

### **3.3 Cultural Mediation and the Development of Higher Mental Functions**

Vygotsky (1981) argued that learning is culturally shaped by the social context in which it happens; hence it cannot be understood without taking into account the environment in which it ensues. In Vygotsky's view the sociocultural context and social involvement create and support the child's higher cognitive processes. He stated:

All higher mental functions are internalised social relationships. . . . Their composition, genetic structure, and means of action - in a word, their whole nature - is social. Even when we turn to mental processes, their nature remains quasi-social. In their own private sphere, human beings retain the functions of social interaction (Vygotsky, 1981, p. 164).

Vygotsky (1978) suggested that within social activities children acquired cultural 'tools' and social innovations which are not inherited genetically. They are established and preserved in our culture. He believed that the aim of education is to acquaint children to a variety of cultural tools, as well to teach them how use these tools to analyse reality efficiently and effectively (Dolya & Palmer, 2004). According to Vygotsky what makes humans intelligent and different from animals is their skill of using varied types of tools in order to communicate with, and understand the social world (Dolya & Palmer, 2004, p. 2). He purported that, just as humans used material tools (such as knives and levers) to expand their physical abilities, psychological tools are created to expand their mental abilities. These tools are the representational systems used to interact with and analyse reality. They comprise of signs, symbols, maps, plans, numbers, musical notation, charts, models, pictures and, the most important of all, language (Dolya & Palmer, 2004, p. 2). Through the use of cultural tools, children develop new psychological qualities, which are called abilities. These are the mental functions people in society require in order to be successful in specific intellectual or creative fields. The greater a learner's understanding of the relevant cultural tools, the better their abilities in any field (Dolya & Palmer, 2004, p. 3). Higher mental functions occur in a 'shared' form for some time, when learners and their mentors utilise novel cultural tools together in the context of solving tasks. After 'appropriating' various cultural tools, children become highly talented in the use of higher mental functions on their own (Bodrova &



Leong, 2001, p. 9). Vygotsky described this evolution from the 'shared' to the 'individual' situation as the law of the development of higher mental functions. A tool for higher mental processes poses dual faces: external and internal (Vygotsky, 1978). According to Bodrova & Leong (2001, p. 10)

On the external plane, the tool is one that learners can use to solve problems that require engaging mental processes at levels not yet available to children (e.g. when a task calls for deliberate memorisation or focused attention). At the same time, on the internal plane, the tool plays a role in the child's construction of his/her own mind, influencing the development of new categories and processes. These new categories and processes eventually lead to the formation of higher mental functions such as focused attention, deliberate memory and logical thought.

The process of teaching and learning in a Grade R class involves interaction with the teachers who mediate learning through the use of various cultural tools. Using Vygotsky's theory as a framework, an exploration of teachers' beliefs and practices in this study revealed significant insights into the value teachers placed on the use of charts, concrete materials, pictures and the use of language in the classroom to mediate learning. Language is considered to be the most powerful cultural artefact the human possesses to mediate their connection to the world, to each other, and to themselves (Williams & Burden, 1997, p. 133). In the next section the relationship between language and its interrelationship with thought as espoused by Vygotsky is discussed.

### **3.4 Thought and Language**

According to Dolya & Palmer (2004, p. 2), "the main premise of Vygotsky's work is the interrelationship between thought and that most universal of cultural tools – language." For Vygotsky, an in depth knowledge of the link between thought and language is necessary in order understand the process of intellectual development. He argued that language is not just an indication of the knowledge the child has attained, instead it shows that there is a fundamental connection between speech and thought in such a way that the one is essentially a resource for the other (Schutz, 2002). Vygotsky maintained that thought is 'internalized language' (Doyle & Palmer, 2004, p. 2). Language for Vygotsky is a form of symbolic representation, which is passed on from generation to generation. It allows the child to 'abstract' the world. Language is described as a "powerful psychological tool" that guides the

thinking processes and assists individuals to develop both cognitively and socially (Vygotsky, 1978, pp. 52-56).

Jarvis & Chandler, (2001, p. 150) noted that language can be divided into three categories, which are social, egocentric and inner. Vygotsky (1978) suggested that children begin by voicing a personal dialogue and then move to social speech. For example when small children are playing, they often keep up a running commentary on what is happening: “and now the train’s going round the tower, and it’s banging in to the tower, and – oh no – the tower’s toppling down...” (Dolya & Palmer, 2004, p. 2). Vygotsky (1978) referred to this as an external monologue and as time progresses; this external monologue becomes internalized as thought. According to Dolya & Palmer, (2004, p. 3):

The speech structures mastered by children therefore become the basic structures of their thinking. For Vygotsky, language was what made thinking even a possibility. Language is the difference between thinking on an elementary level and on a higher level. This means that the development of thought is to a greater extent determined by the linguistic ability of the child. This in turn, is dependent upon the child’s socio-cultural experience; therefore, one of the most important functions of education is to facilitate the development of rich, effective spoken language.

By describing human language development and its links to cognitive development, Vygotsky's social constructivist theory supplies a solid foundation for modern approaches in teaching language. It stresses the importance of early real-world human interaction in language learning and points to less structure and a more flowing, natural, communicative and experiential approach (Krashen, 1988). The use of language as a ‘tool’ for mediating learning was examined in this research study. Teacher’s beliefs on the importance of language and constant dialogue in the Grade R classroom were explored.

In explaining the link between cultural tools, especially language and the social context in which it occurs, as well its impact on cognitive development, Vygotsky also introduced the notion of zone of proximal development (ZPD). The ZPD is an innovative metaphor that describes not the actual, but the potential of human cognitive development (Bodrova & Leong, 1996). The concept of ZPD is discussed further in the next section.

### 3.5 The Zone of Proximal Development “ZPD”

One major tenet in Vygotsky's theory is his explanation of the existence of what he called the ‘zone of proximal development’ (Vygotsky, 1978). Vygotsky mentioned:

.....Every function in the child’s cultural development appears twice: first, on the social level, and later, on the individual level; first, between people (interpsychological) and then inside the child (intrapyschological). This applies equally to voluntary attention, to logical memory, and to the formation of concepts. All the higher functions originate as actual relationships between individuals” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 57).

The higher functions that Vygotsky referred to occur in a specific time and place and is intrinsic to each individual; and is part of their biological and psychological make-up. This time and place is referred to by Vygotsky as the Zone of Proximal Development, or the ZPD. It is here where the ‘interpsychological’ and ‘intrapyschological’ development occurs with the assistance of the immediate support systems (Karpov & Haywood, 1998). Vygotsky (1978, p. 86) defined ZPD as "the distance between the actual development level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers." The ZPD according to Vygotsky's theory refers to a child’s current and potential abilities to do something. In the ZPD, a teacher and a learner or an adult and a child jointly work on a task that the learner or the child cannot perform independently as yet because of the complexity of the task. Vygotsky explained this concept more clearly as follows:

The zone of proximal development defines those functions that have not yet matured but are in the process of maturation, functions that will mature tomorrow but are currently in an embryonic state. These functions could be termed the ‘buds’ or ‘flowers’ of development rather than the ‘fruits’ of development (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86).

The concept of ZPD suggests that human potential is limitless and their capacity can be expanded but is subject to the quality of help received from the available support systems, like mentors or peers (Vygotsky, 1978, pp. 85-86). Contemporary Vygotskian scholar, Nickolai Veraksa stated that the ZPD is “the place where the child and adult meet” (Dolya & Palmer, 2004, p. 4). What is important in the ZPD is the notion of potential. What the child does when engaged in a task is what the child reveals he or she can do today whereas

potential refers to what the child might do with help. So the role of the adult or more expert learner is to help the child move from performance level to the potential level (Smidt, 2009, p. 85). Vygotsky (1978, p. 90) argued that learning creates the ZPD; it awakens a variety of internal development processes that are able to operate only when the child is interacting with people in his environment and in cooperation with his peers. Once these processes are internalised, they become part of the child's independent developmental achievement. One of the things Vygotsky noted in the last account of ZPD was that development and instruction do not coincide. Vygotsky argued that teaching will be ineffective if it is simply geared to developmental levels that have already been achieved, and that "the only 'good learning' is that in advance of development" (Vygotsky 1978, p. 89). It is useful when it moves the learner from where he or she is today to somewhere he or she could be with help (Smidt, 2009, p. 83). Several implications for teaching in the classroom originate from Vygotsky's concept of the ZPD. According to Vygotsky, for the curriculum outcomes to be effective, the educator must plan activities that include not only what learners can do on their own, but also what they may learn with the careful support of others (Karpov & Haywood, 1998).

Vygotsky's theory on the ZPD posed several questions that were explored in this study: What are the curriculum beliefs and practices of Grade R teachers? Do Grade R teachers plan for activities that involve discovery and problem solving? Do Grade R teachers believe that children have the capacity to discover and construct their own learning with support from other people? Flanagan (1999, p. 73) elaborated that "Vygotsky believed the concept of 'ZPD' recommended a better move towards education and allowed a better understanding of the learning process." The ZPD highlights that input from the environment and cognitive development are interrelated, most often in the form of peer support and encouragement that are developed, strengthened, and finally, solidified through language. Language is the conduit that connects the environment with the individual (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86). Vygotsky believed that the responsibility for communicating and sharing their greater collective wisdom with the younger generations rests with the adults and the child's peers. He advocated cooperative learning exercises and suggested that teachers use more skillful peers to develop and support less competent children from within the zone of proximal development (Jarvis & Chandler, 2001, pp. 149-150).

In summary the ZPD is that area where children can achieve a goal with the support and guidance of a more knowledgeable other (MKO) (Galloway, 2001). The MKO in this study refers to the teachers in the selected Grade R classrooms, the children's peers and the support teacher if one is available. However, in order to gain a deeper understanding of the ZPD, one must understand the concept of the more knowledgeable other (MKO) and the variety of strategies that are linked to collaborative learning which is discussed in the next section.

### **3.6 The More Knowledgeable Other (MKO), Scaffolding, Guided Participation and ZPD.**

Vygotsky described those involved in teaching as the 'More Knowledgeable Other.' The MKO refers to anyone who has a deeper understanding or an increased ability level than the learner, especially with regard to a particular concept, task or process (Galloway, 2001). Usually, the MKO is a teacher or a bigger adult. However, this may not always be the case. The MKO could also refer to a sibling, peer, a younger person, or even a computer. Critical to the MKO is that they must be more knowledgeable than the learner about the specific topic being taught (Galloway, 2001). The MKO impacts on the ZPD by helping children develop their potential and raising their levels of competence. While the child is in the ZPD, the MKO gives support to guide them in discovering new knowledge. Once the learner is competent with the new knowledge learnt, the MKO weans off the support and the ZPD moves to a higher level of difficulty (Galloway, 2001). This process of moving the learner from the actual to the possible can be called different things at different times. This support is sometimes called scaffolding, cognitive apprenticeship, guided participation, peer tutoring, reciprocal teaching and situated learning. However they all share the same roots and goals (Smidt, 2009, p. 87). The following section briefly describes each of these strategies that provide support to the learner.

In spite of Vygotsky not using the word "*scaffolding*" himself, the concept is associated with him (Berk & Winsler 1995, p. 26). Scaffolding is a term used by Bruner to explain what the more expert other could do to provide carefully scaled support to enable children to bridge the ZPD (Smidt, 2009, p. 89). Often a characteristic of effective teaching is when the MKO constantly changes the degree of help in response to a child's level of performance. Siraj-Blatchford (2009, p. 156) refers to this as 'sustained shared thinking'. This process not only generates quick results, but also inculcates the skills necessary for autonomous problem

solving in upcoming tasks (Fedon & Vogel, 2006, p. 189). When a child is coached on how to do something he may accomplish this task or a similar task at a later stage on his/her own. Scaffolding is similar to scaffolding around a building. It can be removed when it is no longer needed (Jarvis & Chandler 2001, p. 154).

The term scaffolding can be interpreted in a variety of different ways. *Cognitive apprenticeship*, naturally situated within the social constructivist paradigm, is another term used to describe scaffolding (Smidt, 2009, p. 88). Constructivists see learners as being active constructors of meaning rather than passive recipients. It is a model where learners work collaboratively on projects or problems with close scaffolding of the instructor (Smidt, 2009). The tasks are slightly more difficult for the learners to manage on their own and require the help of either their peers or an adult or both to succeed. It is another way of describing scaffolding as the learner works alongside others and can watch and learn from them (Smidt, 2009, pp. 87-88).

In addition *guided participation*, another process of moving learners from the actual to the possible, is a term used by Barbara Rogoff to explain the learning that takes place through adults and children being together in real life situations (Smidt, 2009, p. 38). It builds upon adult talk as a scaffold by expanding the social context and highlighting the role of the child in relation to the adult. Gauvain (2001) noted that in this view, “the child is not merely a learner, or a naïve actor who follows the instructions or prompts of the more experienced partner. Rather, the child is a full participant, albeit participants of a specific type characterized by individual and developmentally related skills, interests and resources” (p. 38). ‘Conceptual play’ described by Fler (2010, p. 213), involves the teacher guiding and supporting children’s learning. Besides preparing the environment for children to learn, the teacher’s role is to direct learning through questioning, and provide extended learning experiences which build on the conceptual learning taking place.

*Reciprocal teaching*, another interpretation of scaffolding, refers to a teaching activity which is set in a form of a dialogue between teachers and learners. The dialogue is structured by the use of four strategies: summarising, question generating, clarifying and predicting. What makes the teaching reciprocal is that the teacher and learners take turns in leading the dialogue (Smidt, 2009, p. 87).

*Peer tutoring*, is also interpreted as a type of scaffolding; is a process where one learner adopts the role of expert in teaching another learner. The children involved in this process are of similar ages and what is common to them is that one of the pair is an expert in something and the other is a novice. It is a teaching tool that allows both partners, novice and the more knowledgeable other, to learn more (Smidt, 2009, pp. 88-89).

Finally *situated learning* is based on the concept that learning is a function of the activity itself and that the context and the culture are vital to it. Social interaction is a component of situated learning. Learners become involved in what is called a ‘community of practice’ (Smidt, 2009, p. 87). According to Wenger (2006, p. 1) “communities of practice are groups of people who share a passion for something they do, and who interact regularly to learn how to do it better.” He also added that people in a community of practice are practitioners. They develop a shared collection of resources, experiences, stories, tools, and ways of addressing recurring problems, in short a shared practice (Wenger, 2006, p. 2). Learners become more involved and engaged with classroom culture by adopting its beliefs and values (Smidt, 2009, p. 87). The significance of this is that it reminds us that the activities themselves are important in determining what is learned and how it is learned in the classroom (Smidt, 2009, p. 89).

All the styles of teaching and learning related to scaffolding are interrelated and often overlap. An understanding of these varied processes of scaffolding is vital, as it highlights the role of the educator in helping children bridge the gap between what they can do alone, and what they might do after being helped. The use of play is also considered as a method of mediating and scaffolding learning. Many researchers and educationists believe that the play approach to teaching and learning in the early years is essential. Examples are: Moyles, (2005) in her book, *The Excellence of Play*, Wood & Attfield, (2005) in their book, *Play, Learning and the Early Childhood Curriculum*, and Youlden & Harrison (2006) in their evaluation report on ‘The Better Play Programme 2000-2005’. Teachers’ beliefs and practices regarding play as an approach to teaching and learning were explored in this study. Therefore, it is important to mention that in his last lecture, *Play and the Psychological Development of the Child*, Vygotsky stressed the importance of play during the early years (Dolya & Palmer, 2004). Vygotsky (1978, p. 102) stated "Play also creates the zone of proximal development of the child. In play, the child is always behaving beyond his age,

above his usual everyday behaviour; in play he is, as it were, a head above himself.” Since one of the fundamental principles in Early Childhood Education is the importance of play in children’s learning and development, and research documents the value of play in several areas of children’s school readiness including: academic competencies, social-emotional development, and physical development (Wood, 2004, p. 19), Vygotsky’s views on the role of play in children’s learning and development is considered in the next section.

### **3.7 The Role of Play in Children’s Learning and Development**

Vygotsky’s theory of play is most well-known from his chapter, ‘The Role of Play in Development’, in *Mind in Society* (1978). Vygotsky’s research on play is an integral aspect of his cultural-historical theory of psychology, with major implications for understanding education and development during the pre-school years (Duncan & Tarulli, 2003, p. 272). Vygotsky (1967, p. 16) argued that during the pre-school period, “the child moves forward essentially through play activity.” Play is “the leading source of development in the pre-school years” (Vygotsky, 1967, p. 6).

Vygotsky was a strong advocate of play as a means of promoting ‘spontaneous learning’ as children at play are in a ZPD. In play, children learn rules that enable them move much higher than their current level as they act out real-life situations (Smidt, 2009). As Vygotsky (1978 p. 103) stated, "It is incorrect to conceive of play as an activity without purpose...creating an imaginary situation can be regarded as a means of developing abstract thought." Vygotsky viewed play, particularly pretend play, as highly significant to development and a vital component of childhood. Vygotsky (1978, p. 74) argued that “play contains in a concentrated form, as in the focus of a magnifying glass, all developmental tendencies.” He believed that in dramatic play children progressed beyond their current cognitive, memory and logical thinking abilities. Vygotsky (1967, p. 8) stated that a child “plays without realizing the motives of the play activity.” According to Vygotsky (1978) play creates a broad ZPD, both in cognitive and socio-emotional development. Vygotsky’s theory on the role of play in children’s cognitive development, socio-emotional development and expansion of the children’s imagination is explored next.



### 3.7.1 Play Develops Cognitive Skills

Bergen (2002) in her journal article, *The Role of Pretend Play in Children's Cognitive Development*, suggested that there is a vast body of research that address the links between cognitive achievement and skilfully implemented pretend play. She listed several studies completed in the late 1970s and early 1980s that validated the hypotheses about this relationship, such as the early studies linked play to young children's mathematics readiness (Yawkey, 1981), linguistic/literacy abilities (Pellegrini, 1980), cognitive functioning and impulse control (Saltz, Dixon, & Johnson, 1977), and problem-solving skills (Smith & Dutton, 1979). Bergen (2002) believed that if children lack opportunities to experience play, their long-term capacities related to metacognition, problem solving, and social cognition, as well as to academic areas such as literacy, mathematics, and science, may be diminished.

Originating from his analysis of pre-school children's play, Vygotsky also found that play not only achieves children's physical and emotional needs, it also motivates and stimulates their intellectual development. Vygotsky (1978) suggested that the 'pretend' situation of play provides an imaginative dimension in which children learn to use substitutions of things to act. When children disconnect the meaning from the object it promotes the development of abstract thought. For example in actions like riding a broomstick as if it were a horse, children separate the literal meaning of the object from its imagined meaning. According to Vygotsky this marks the commencement of abstract thinking (Vygotsky, 1978, pp. 96-99). In Vygotsky's words, "Through play the child achieves a functional definition of the concept or object, and words become parts of a thing" (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 99). Language develops as a child plays and interacts with others. Vygotsky described play as a scaffolding activity that expands the children's ZPD, stimulating them in issues and concepts that are not achieved through interaction in society or even through the school's curriculum (Bodrova & Leong, 2001). In addition Bodrova & Leong, (1996, p. 160) mentioned:

"Children gain mental tools in their ZPD during symbolic play. These tools are a vital source of independent psychological growth. Play is a critical component of a child's development as their intellectual growth is often bolstered by this fantasy fun. Within the Vygotskian framework, internalisation is the ...process of appropriation or learning to the point at which the tools are mental and their use is not visible to others."

Vandenberg (1986, 21) argued that in Vygotskian theory, play actually facilitates cognitive development. Children not only practice what they already know, they also learn new things. This study examined teachers' beliefs on the use of play in the classroom. Several questions were addressed in this study: Do the Grade R teachers in the study believe that children learn by doing? Do they use play to nurture each child's cognitive growth? Do they plan 'hands-on' play and learning experiences that advance children's cognitive skills?

### **3.7.2 Play Develops Social Skills**

A growing body of research supports the belief, that play develops social skills in children. The Better Play Evaluation study found that children learnt social skills through play. Practical skills were learned experientially, while social skills were learned through activities and interaction with others (Youlden & Harrison, 2006). The social skills mentioned in the study refer to the development of positive social relationships, greater tolerance, acceptance of differences and the development of friendships (Youlden & Harrison, 2006).

Vygotsky (1978) stressed the importance of social and cultural factors in play. Vygotsky (1966, p. 43) stated that "we become ourselves through others." He noted that make-believe play is socially and culturally determined, and as children explore this type of play they are deepening their understanding of the social life and rules of their communities. Vygotsky argued that play is not the most unrestricted, 'free' activity; instead it presents the context in which children face more constraints than in any other context (Bodrova & Leong, 2001). Although it is constraining, play is considered as one of the most desirable activities of childhood because children are extremely motivated to abide by these limits. Thus, play provides a unique context in which children are motivated to act and at the same time develop the ability to self-regulate their behaviour. As play matures there is a progressive transition from reactive and impulsive behaviours, to behaviours that are more deliberate and thoughtful (Bodrova & Leong, 2001, pp. 15-16).

Through play and social interaction a child learns to respond to cues from others, to understand their feelings and different views, control their impulses, exercise self-control and developing empathy for others (Vygotsky 1978). Furthermore through social play, a child substitutes objects as props to assist in recreating the environment that surrounds them. For instance a child uses dolls to represent home life, blocks to create houses, and a handbag or

brief case to look like the grown-ups around them. Through this form of play a child copies the adult world, experiences problems, and learns about interests and concerns (Vygotsky 1978, p. 99).

Since social skills are essential for success in early childhood and beyond and play is the best medium for social and emotional learning to occur, this study examined the development of social skills in Grade R classes. Teachers' beliefs and practices regarding play and its social benefits were examined using Vygotsky's theory. It explored the practice of play scenarios in the classrooms that helped children learn to negotiate and problem solve with their peers.

### **3.7.3 Play Expands Imagination**

Vygotsky (1978) regarded play as a creative imaginary process. Play is seen as a creative action that represents a dialectic affiliation between memory (reproduction) and imagination (creativity), but the most fundamental feature of play is that it is never pure reproduction. Vygotsky noted that a child's imagination starts to grow before her intellect. Since it is important for a child to extract from a multitude of experiences in order to connect abstract concepts to concrete intellectually, the development of child's imagination precedes the development of the intellect. Playful activities can include fantasy play that recreates make-believe worlds. This area of play nurtures the imagination and improves creativity. Vygotsky believed that in this type of play, a child's imagination recreates the function of objects to help invent the imagined world (Vygotsky, 1978, pp. 92-94). For example, for the child a rug can become a magic flying carpet and a straw or a stick can become a magic wand.

In summary, Vygotsky's theory highlighted that play is critical and fundamental in Early Childhood Education and teachers need to play a significant role in facilitating and fostering the learning that happens during play to promote skill acquisition. Teachers' practices regarding play and how carefully they planned the resources and materials offered were explored in this study. Teacher beliefs and practices on the use of appropriate play opportunities that cater for the strengths and needs of individual children to help them reach the next level in their development were also examined. However, despite Vygotsky's theory being privileged in this research study, his theory has been criticised. A brief overview of some of the criticisms raised against this theory is discussed in the next section.

### **3.8 Critics of Vygotsky's Theory**

Various criticisms have been expressed against Vygotsky's work. First, it is said that Vygotsky only succeeded in achieving an extensive outline of his theory, with very limited details. This is somewhat justified by the fact that he passed away the age of 37 from tuberculosis, before he had developed a comprehensive theory (Wertsch, 1985). Other critics say Vygotsky emphasized the role of language in thinking far too much and that his overemphasis on collaboration and guidance has negative consequences if teachers are a bit too helpful in some cases. Some critics argue that this approach may lead to laziness in some children who may expect constant assistance even when they can do something independently (Santrock, 2004).

Another criticism of Vygotsky's theory is the vagueness of the ZPD. An ambiguity with the ZPD is the fact that little is known about the generality and stability of an individual's ZPD. Several questions regarding the ambiguity of ZPD were posed: Is a child's ZPD for one domain equal across all domains? Does the size of a child's ZPD change over time? Is guided participation from adults necessary or only helpful for development? Is improvement within the ZPD long-lasting, or only temporary? While the concept of the ZPD is a key aspect of Vygotsky's sociocultural approach, knowledge about this concept according to some critics is too ambiguous and needs to be broadened (Miller, 2002).

Critics of Vygotsky also add that insufficient attention is given to developmental issues. They claimed that a more developmental interpretation of both contexts and children is needed. They maintained that Vygotsky's theory presents a limited description of the contexts of the children being taught in respect of their various ages or developmental levels. Children's capabilities, needs, and interests at different ages affect the nature of the contexts they seek out and the effect that a particular context has on them. Hence, a significant issue that Vygotsky's theory overlooks is that children of varied developmental levels bring a variety of things to a setting, and thus more emphasis needs to be given to a child's cognitive and physical developmental levels (Miller, 2002).

Another criticism is that Vygotsky's theory has too much of a social emphasis. Some critics believe that Vygotsky may have over played the importance of the social environment

leading him to ignore biological factors. They believe that this makes his theory too simplistic as he outlines only the social environment as a major factor (Miller 2002).

A final criticism is that there has been little research undertaken to support Vygotsky's theory. Critics report that this is because Vygotsky's theory does not lend itself as readily to experimentation as it is hard to operationalise (Miller 2002).

However, indicators of effective pedagogy discussed in the literature in Chapter Two show characteristics of collaborative learning environments, that include opportunities for 'sustained shared thinking and makes use of effective questions and a variety of learning tools to scaffold children's learning, all of which are essentially principles of Vygotsky's theory. A key aspect of Vygotsky's theory and an important reason why it is of paramount importance in this study is that the teacher's role is conceptualised as being proactive in creating play/learning environments, as well as being responsive to children's choices, interests and patterns of learning. Many pedagogical recommendations of effective practice are informed by Vygotsky's social constructivist theory, which also underpins contemporary early childhood curriculum models such as Te Whāriki in New Zealand, and the Reggio Emilia approach (Wood, 2004, p. 21). These two approaches that draw from Vygotsky's theory will be discussed in the next section.

### **3.9 Contemporary Curriculum Models that draw from Vygotsky's Approach**

Varied philosophies and pedagogical approaches to early childhood and learning are manifested in the many different types of early childhood programs. These following contemporary early childhood curriculum models are informed by Vygotsky's social constructivist theories: Te Whāriki in New Zealand (Ministry of Education, 1996) and Reggio Emilia (Rinaldi, 2006). A significant feature of these curriculum models is that learning through play is not left to chance, but is realised through complex interactions and relationships, and is rooted in activities that are socially constructed and mediated. In these curriculum models children's interests remain central to curriculum planning and the subject disciplines enrich and develop children's learning (Wood, 2004, p. 21).

### 3.9.1 Te Whāriki

Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory forms the basis of the Te Whāriki, bicultural national curriculum of early childhood New Zealand. Central to the Te Whāriki curriculum is the emphasis placed on the many varied social environments in which learners live and the social, collaborative method of learning (Ministry of Education, 1996). It is founded on the understanding that learners: grow up as competent, confident learners and communicators, healthy in mind, body, and spirit, secure in their sense of belonging and in the knowledge that they make a valued contribution to society (Ministry of Education, 1996, p. 9). Reedy (1995 p. 17) described the bicultural paradigm in Te Whāriki as:

encouraging the transmission of my cultural values, my language and tikanga, and your cultural values, language and customs. It validates my belief systems and your belief systems also. Te Whāriki is a whāriki woven by loving hands that can cross cultures with respect that can weave people and nations together. Te Whāriki is about providing a base that teaches one to respect oneself and ultimately others.

According to the New Zealand Ministry of Education (1996, p. 13), the literal meaning of Te Whāriki is 'the woven mat'. ECE services use the curriculum's principles and strands to weave a learning programme for children. A child's strengths and interests, all the things they learn as part of their family, as well the community and school learning opportunities are all woven together to contribute to a child's unique learning story. Te Whāriki outlines an integrated curriculum based on the principles of: empowerment, holistic development, and family and community relationships (Ministry of Education, 1996, p. 40). These principles are interwoven with five strands. The first strand is well-being - *mana atua*. Children experience an environment where: their health is promoted; their emotional well-being is nurtured and they are kept safe from harm. The second strand is belonging - *mana whenua*. Children and their families experience an environment where: connecting links with the family and wider world are affirmed and extended; they know they have a place; they feel comfortable with the routines, customs and regular events; they know the limits and boundaries of acceptable behaviour. The third strand is contribution - *mana tangata*. Children experience an environment where: there are equitable opportunities for learning, irrespective of gender, ability, age, ethnicity, or background; they are affirmed as individuals; they are encouraged to learn with and alongside others. The fourth step is communication – *mana reo*. Children experience an environment where: they develop non-verbal communication skills

for a range of purposes; they experience the stories and symbols of their own and other cultures; they discover and develop different ways to be creative and expressive. Finally the fifth step is exploration - *mana aoturoa*. Children experience an environment where: their play is valued as meaningful learning and the importance of spontaneous play is recognised; they gain confidence in and control of their bodies; they learn strategies for active exploration, thinking, and reasoning; they develop working theories for making sense of the natural, social physical and material worlds (Ministry of Education, 1996).

### **3.9.2 Reggio Emilia**

This approach stresses the position of children as capable instruments in their own learning (Edwards, Gandini, & Forman, 1993). This principle is a key component of Vygotsky's theory. Rinaldi, (2006) noted that in this curriculum model each child creates his/her own meaning and is supported to do so when peers and adults validate his/her competence. In this model the child is surrounded by warm reciprocal relationships and education is seen as a building of thinking relationships between persons, and between ideas and the environment (Rinaldi, 2006). It is an emergent curriculum that unfolds from the ideas and interest of the learners. Educators must be able to tap into the rich knowledge that young, eager children enter the educational context with and build upon and develop the strengths of the children (Dockett, Perry, Campbell, Hard, Kearney & Taffe, 2007, p. 20). Learner's eager interaction with people and resources is considered the source for their development. Developing learning skills and providing opportunities to discover is seen as the basis of the approach and the intention is that through communication and consistent dialogue (spoken language, drawing, constructing models, drama and music) children will acquire the ability to think, create and test ideas and concepts (Dockett et al., 2007, p. 20).

The classroom context in this method of teaching is regarded as the learner's 'third teacher', and is carefully and creatively tailored to be a warm, relaxed, happy, and inviting space for both learners and adults (Edwards, Gandini, & Forman, 1993). At the heart of the Reggio Emilia approach is the importance placed on giving learners an opportunity to express themselves in a variety of ways in order for them to discover and communicate understanding (the multiple languages of children); teachers who observe, guide, listen and motivate a learner's involvement in shared experiences; and comprehensive documentation of children's involvement in a variety of experiences (Stephen, 2006). In summary this approach values

collaborated experiences and interaction in all areas, and supports the individual growth of learners as well. At the centre of the Reggio Emilia approach is the need to inspire and motivate the learners to become the active and creative problem-solvers of the world (Dockett et al., 2007, p. 21).

### **3.10 Conclusion**

Vygotsky advocated that children learn best in a social, interactive context, where language is perceived as being crucial for both formal and informal instruction (Berk & Winsler, 1995; Rieber & Robinson, 2004). His work has underlined the value of cooperative learning, play and socialising in early childhood settings and the teachers' role in extending children's learning. In addition, he addressed the importance of tools such as language for cognitive development and was also a strong advocate of play as a means of promoting 'spontaneous learning'. According to Vygotsky children are socialised into cultural learning, using relevant cognitive and communicative tools that are passed down from generation to generation. This means that children learn cognitive and linguistic skills from those more developed than they are, such as capable adults, caregivers, peers and teachers who assist and regulate the child's cognitive and linguistic performance.

Research studies on effective practice conclude that settings which incorporate principles of Vygotsky's theory, such as active engagement of the learner, and build on the interests and experiences of the learners using collaborative or 'shared thinking' strategies through the use of play show evidence of high quality practice. For teachers, he provided a theoretical underpinning for effective practice. He identified the key elements in successful teaching, learning and development. Vygotsky believed that true education is not the mere learning of specific knowledge and skills, it is the development of children's learning abilities, such as their capacity to think clearly and creatively, plan and implement their plans, and communicate their understanding in a variety of ways (Dolya & Palmer, 2004, p. 3). The implications of Vygotsky's theories and observations for teachers are significant. In Vygotsky's view, the teacher has the collaborative "task of guiding and directing the child's activity" (Vygotsky, 1991, p. 118). In other words, children learn by solving problems with the help of the teacher, who models processes for them and his or her peers, in a classroom environment that is directed by the teacher. In essence, "the child imitates the teacher through a process of re-creating previous classroom collaboration" (Gredler & Shields, 2004, p. 22).



The beliefs and practices of selected Grade R teachers were explored in this study using ‘Vygotskian’ principles as a theoretical lens. For educators who share Vygotsky’s beliefs about the processes of learning and development, the aim of education in the early years involves more than imparting specific knowledge. It involves equipping children with tools that will lead to the development of higher mental functions (Bodrova & Leong, 1996).

In the next chapter the research methodology that is designed to respond to the critical question in the study is described.

## **Chapter 4: Research Methodology**

### **4.1 Introduction**

“I suggest that we think about the research process as a form of adventure... a positive, yet somewhat risky, enterprise” (Willig, 2008, p. 2)

As Willig mentions I regard this research study as an adventure and a journey into the unknown. I undertook this research study in the different schools with a feeling of uncertainty as to what my findings will yield hence, a somewhat ‘risky enterprise’. However, as with any journey a map is required to give direction. This chapter maps out the route taken in this research study. In this chapter, I discuss the methodology, which includes the case study design, sampling decisions, the data generation strategies and analysis procedures. It concludes with a section on ethical considerations and limitations of this study.

### **4.2 Research Approach**

In order to achieve my research goal, namely to explore teachers beliefs and practices within a context of effective pedagogy, it became necessary to examine more closely the beliefs and teaching practices of my participants. I wanted to gain an understanding of why and how the participating teachers were teaching in their particular ways. Qualitative research is concerned with different understandings people bring to their experiences and the ways that they choose to respond to them (Newby, 2010, p. 115). It is for this reason I employed a qualitative research approach which I felt would be the most appropriate. Merriam (1998, p. 7) noted that qualitative research takes place in the participants’ natural settings, so that the data obtained is as realistic as possible. Bauer & Gaskell (2003) defined qualitative research as a type of research that avoids numbers, but deals with interpreting social realities. The value of qualitative research lies in the fact that it allows for the use of non-interfering data collection techniques where researchers can capture the natural flow of events and how the participants interpret them. A qualitative approach is very helpful when describing, explaining and analysing a subject’s individual and social actions, beliefs, thoughts and perceptions (Schofield, 1990, pp. 202-232; Rubin & Rubin, 1995, p. 2; McNiff, 1998, pp. 45, 83, 140). A qualitative researcher, however, should be aware that each participant brings different life experiences and understandings to the research situation (Newby, 2010).

Merriam (1998, p. 4) supported this when he spoke about ‘multiple realities’. Such nuanced understandings cannot be captured through quantitative research. Since I intended examining the Grade R teachers’ beliefs and practices, my research needed to take on an interpretive orientation. Merriam (1998, p. 4) explained that interpretive research is concerned with meanings that individuals bring to experiences and theories that can be generated through the research process. For this study the qualitative research approach allowed for a better understanding of teachers’ subjective beliefs and practices in Grade R classes.

### **4.3 Research Design**

A research design is a blueprint of how you intend conducting your research (Mouton, 2001, p. 55). My motivation for this research as stated in the first chapter is one of interest and professional curiosity about pedagogy in Grade R classes. Silverman (2005, p. 126) stressed that a case study is a detailed analysis of a phenomenon in order to understand it better. A case study “is an intensive, holistic description and an analysis of a single instance, phenomenon, or social unit” (Merriam, 1998, p. 21).

#### **4.3.1 Case Study**

This study has design features particular to an exploratory case study research design as this type of in-depth comparative work of different Grade R teachers’ beliefs and practices in the greater Durban area of KwaZulu-Natal is limited. According to Cohen, Manion, & Morrison (2007, p. 253), a case study (i) is a specific instance that is designed to illustrate a more general principle; (ii) is the study of an instance in action; (iii) provides a unique example of real people in real situations, enabling readers to understand ideas more clearly than by simply presenting them with abstract theories or principles; (iv) can enable readers to understand how ideas and abstract principles fit together; and (v) can penetrate situations in ways that are not always susceptible to numerical analysis. Stake (2000) delineated three types of case studies: intrinsic, instrumental, and collective. Intrinsic case studies focus on a case that is unusual and is of particular interest to the researcher and the intent is not to build theory (Stake, 2000; Creswell, 2002). An instrumental case study is pursued in order to provide insight about a particular issue that may be generalizable and its primary purpose is to help advance understanding (Stake, 2000; Creswell, 2002). The collective case study encompasses more than one case "in order to investigate a phenomenon, population, or

general condition" (Stake, 2000, p. 437). Since the purpose is to help advance understanding, a collective case study is a grouping of instrumental case studies (Stake, 2000). According to Stake (2000, p. 437), using a collective case study approach allows for the possibility of stronger interpretation, and "perhaps better theorizing" In comparative case study research such as this, Bryman (2001, p. 531) suggested that the key to the comparative design is its ability to allow the distinguishing characteristics of two or more cases to act as a springboard for theoretical reflections about contrasting findings. Therefore, this research study is an in-depth analysis of three schools with three teachers. Multiple case studies are "considered more compelling, and the overall study is therefore regarded as more robust" (Yin, 2003, p. 46).

I was aware that in using a multiple case study approach in this research I would understand pedagogical issues more deeply, as well as identify what, if any lessons could be learnt that may be useful in other contexts. However, due to the unique nature of each case, the difficulty in generalising from case study research is perceived as a weakness of this approach (Newby, 2010). Other perceived weaknesses of the approach are the possibility of presenting biased information and the difficulty in cross-checking, which may lead to doubtful reliability (Tobin & Kincheloe, 2006; Denscombe, 2007). However, the in-depth nature of a case study gives a unique perspective on a situation that may be lost in larger scale research projects such as surveys (Denscombe, 2007).

Cohen et al. (2007, p. 253) noted that case studies are conducted in specific temporal, geographical, organisational or institutional contexts. The schools were selected to optimise the contrasts in contexts in order to get a better understanding of Grade R teachers' beliefs and practices in different community settings, using participants from different ethnic backgrounds. This research study is particularly suitable for a case study design because it is a bounded system, it is contextual, and it is a study of process (Creswell 2003, p. 15). In the next section, an introduction to each of the teachers in the sample is given together with a description of the schools in which they teach. The descriptions of the schools are based on observations and informal discussions with the principal and teacher participants.

### 4.3.2 The Study Sample: The Schools and Teachers

This study was conducted in the Umlazi District<sup>13</sup> of the eThekweni<sup>14</sup> Region within the urban context of KwaZulu-Natal. There are many Grade R classes in this circuit but I made a selection based on a few factors. Sampling in a research context is understood as the process through which a small sample is selected from a large group (Schumacher & McMillan, 1993, p. 300). This study was conducted only in Grade R classrooms at state-based schools and excluded what is offered in private early childhood centres.

In this study, a purposeful convenience sample strategy was used to select the schools from the eThekweni region. Nieuwenhuis, (2007, p. 70) suggested that “purposive sampling means that participants are selected because of some defining characteristics that make them the holders of the data needed for the study.” Cohen et al. (2007, p. 115) stated that purposive sampling is used in order to access ‘knowledgeable’ people, meaning those people with in-depth knowledge about a particular issue. This is the least rigorous sampling technique, involving the selection of the most accessible subjects. It entails little cost to the researcher, in terms of time, effort and money. This method of sampling is often used in qualitative research as it acknowledges that the sample chosen may not reflect the population at large (Cohen et al., 2007). These schools are departmental based Grade R classes from within the vicinity of the researcher so that it was easy to access as well as manage and control. I purposefully selected three sites for this research, varying from low to middle class socio-economic backgrounds catering for learners from different ethnic/cultural backgrounds. One Grade R teacher from each site participated in this research project. The teacher participants in the study represent different ethnic backgrounds. The first school is an inner city average working class community. The second school is in a middle class community and the third school is from the lower working class community. The diversity in the schools, and the teacher participants chosen in this study allow for a rich comparison of beliefs and practices in different contexts. Image 4.1 reflects the demographic sample of the study.

---

<sup>13</sup> Schools in the Umlazi District Cluster are located within the municipal boundary of eThekweni. The Cluster geographically extends from Umlazi in the south to Umhlanga in the north, and from the Bluff in the east to KwaSanti (Pinetown) in the west.

<sup>14</sup> eThekweni is one of the 11 districts of KwaZulu-Natal province and includes the city of Durban and surrounding areas.

**Image 4.1 Demographic sample of the study**



### **School A**

This school with an enrolment of approximately 150 learners has been in existence since 1948 and is an inner city state Grade R school with two Grade R classes of 25 learners each. The school also caters for three to five year olds. The principal hopes to source funding to cater for babies and toddlers in the future. There are six female teachers, each responsible for her own class. The school is adequately resourced with desks, chairs, educational toys, wooden blocks, construction toys as well as creative and fantasy play equipment. There are sufficient spacious classrooms. It has plenty of outdoor space with trees; a sand and water play area, swings, climbing apparatus, developmental play apparatus, a vegetable garden, a pet rabbit in a rabbit run and one chicken in the back garden. Historically this was a Model C<sup>15</sup> white working class school, now 85% of the learners are black. The school has a rich diversity of cultures with immigrant learners from different parts of Africa that speak French, Swahili, Lingali, and Portugese. It also has South African learners that speak English, Afrikaans, IsiZulu, and Xhosa. The

<sup>15</sup> Model C- in the apartheid era white children's schools were known as Model C Schools.

language of instruction in the school is English. The school fees are R500 rand a month. The school has staff from different ethnic groups and there are no teacher assistants in the Grade R classes.

### **School B**

School B is an ex Model C middle class school located approximately 10km south of central Durban accommodating 800 learners from the pre-school phase to Grade 7 and has been in existence since 1920. The school previously catered for the white population living around the school. Today, children from all ethnic groups attend the school. According to the principal, most of the children who come to school are English speakers. However, other languages that are spoken by some children who attend school are isiZulu, Xhosa and Afrikaans. The language of instruction in the school is English. The pre-primary section of the school established in 2000 has two Grade R classes with 22 learners each and no assistant teacher. The school also caters for three to five year olds. The school employs a total of 10 pre-school staff members. A professional complement of support staff (i.e.) an Occupational and Speech Therapist, Remedial Specialist, Educational Psychologist and two fully qualified counsellors are available at the main school campus. The school buildings are well maintained. The school is well resourced with sufficient classrooms that are spacious, with modern hexagon desks and comfortable chairs. Indoor play resources include opportunities to play with blocks, construction toys, housekeeping toys, creative toys, books, easels for painting, puzzles, and fantasy play costumes in a special dramatic play area. The outside play area allows children to have access to swings, a sand box, water play, wheeled toys and climbing apparatus. The school has a large garden where the children can explore and stretch their developing muscles. It has a large swimming pool at the main campus which is used by the pre-school section on allocated days. The school fees are R850 per month. The school offers many extra mural activities to ensure a stimulating and culturally rich education. According to the principal, since the schools inception, the pre-primary has adhered to its tradition of only employing teachers who are professionally qualified in Foundation Phase education, so that the learners are given the best start to their educational career. The principal mentioned that the educators attend frequent workshops and courses to keep in touch with the latest trends in education.

## **School C**

This primary school is approximately 10km west of Durban central. It has its origins in the 1950's as a state school for coloured learners. Since 1994, when the school opened its doors to all ethnic groups the demographics of the school changed from predominantly coloured to predominantly African learners. Most learners today emanate from the surrounding informal settlement as well as townships like KwaMashu, Lamontville, Claremont, Chesterville and Umlazi. The language of instruction is English. Most of the children in the school speak IsiZulu. Learners are mainly from lower socio economic income groups. The school has a feeding scheme which comprises of sandwiches made by a generous donor on a daily basis for approximately 350 learners. The school population has increased to more than double the enrolment in 1994 from 425 learners to 936 in 2011. Classrooms for the single Grade R class and an additional Grade 1 class became necessary in 2009. Staff increased from 14 in 1994 to 24 in 2011 and management increased from one Principal to a Deputy Principal and four Heads of Department (HoD). The biggest challenge the school faces on a daily basis is funding. School fees are R50 a month totalling R600 per annum of which only 40% of the parents pay. The school infrastructure has aged and repairs and maintenance to pipes, toilets, windows and doors depletes available funds. In addition, the burden of Quintile 5<sup>16</sup> status means that the monetary allocation by the DoE is low. The Grade R class was established in 2009 and has 43 learners. The teacher has an IsiZulu speaking helper to assist in the classroom when needed. The classroom is large with just enough space to accommodate desks and chairs and has its own toilet facilities and a small play area outside. In terms of resources, the school is limited. The outdoor play area has two swings and a small climbing apparatus.

### **4.4 Research Question**

The research question is framed as follows:

What are the beliefs and practices of Grade R teachers within a context of effective pedagogy in selected Grade R/Reception Year classes in the greater Durban area of KwaZulu-Natal?

---

<sup>16</sup> Quintile 5- Quintile 1 schools are the poorest, and Quintile 5 schools the wealthiest (former Model C schools fall into this quintile). The quintile system has been criticised, and is being reviewed by the Department of Basic Education.



To facilitate a deep exploration of the research question, three key aspects guided the study in its investigation. The first aspect explored the beliefs of the three Grade R teachers and its compatibility with effective practice and Vygotsky's theory. The second foregrounded the nature of practice in the Grade R classroom and compared it to studies on effective pedagogy and Vygotsky's theory. Thirdly the study focused on reasons for change in the belief practice domain.

In the next section I give a brief description of the data generating strategies for this study. The methodology for this study is guided by the research question asked.

#### **4.5 Negotiating Access**

Conducting research in schools is demanding as it can be viewed as an interruption or a hindrance to the daily running of a school. It involves gaining access to information and to teachers or other resources through the gatekeepers who in most cases are the principals, heads of departments and governing body of the schools whose permission is vital (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 50; Willis, 2007, p. 241). I obtained permission from the KZN Department of Education to conduct research in the schools (refer to Appendix A), but I still had to negotiate access into the schools. In this study my first avenue of negotiation was a telephonic conversation to each principal of the selected schools explaining my research project and requesting permission for an appointment to explain the whole process in person. I then visited each school principal to explain the research study and the process face-to-face. Thereafter a letter was given to the principal and governing bodies of the schools to request written permission. The letter included details of the study, the ethical issues considered as well as the aim of the study and how the study would be conducted in their schools (refer to Appendix C1). The principals and governing bodies of all three schools agreed to participate in the study and signed the consent form. As soon as I received consent from the governing body and principal I then met with the Grade R teachers in each school explaining the intended research and their significant role in it as they were the focus of my study. I reassured them about anonymity, confidentiality and their right to stop their involvement in the study at any time. All the teachers in the study agreed to participate and signed the letter of informed consent (refer to Appendix C2). In addition a

letter explaining the study and my presence in the classroom was given to each to school to be sent to the parents of the learners in whose classes I would be conducting the study (refer to Appendix C3). This was necessary as the parents have a right to be informed about my presence in the classroom even though the children were not directly involved in the research. This letter included the ethical issues considered by the researcher, details the aim of the study and explained how the study will be conducted in the school.

#### **4.6 Data Collection**

Mouton (2001, p. 55) stated that research methodology is the systematic, methodical and accurate execution of the research design where various methods and tools are used to perform different tasks. It provides the rationale for how the researcher will proceed. In this section, I will briefly mention what data production techniques I used in conducting this study. These techniques informed the process of data production.

The data used in the analysis, was collected over a one and a half month period, beginning in May 2011 and ending in the middle of June 2011. Since the purpose of a case study research is to provide an in-depth exploration of the process under study, it required intensive data collection (Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2003) using "multiple forms of data" (Creswell, 2002, p. 486). While conducting this case study, I used multiple procedures or methods of data collection, including interviews, observations and document analysis. This enabled me to present richly descriptive and detailed data on the three Grade R teachers who constitute my main unit of analysis. I conducted a semi-structured interview with each of the three teachers as I felt that this was an important and valuable method of direct data collection on the teachers' beliefs, knowledge and understandings of pedagogy. I then conducted a week's observation at each site in order to get a comprehensive understanding of practice. Finally, in order to understand the tools used to support practice and to supplement information obtained a documentary analysis was undertaken. Table 4.1 provides a list showing the dates of preliminary visits, interviews and observation for each case study.

**Table 4.1 Data Collection Schedule**

Nature of Visit	School A - Gugu	School B - Nicky	School C - Amy
Preliminary visit	May 3	May 3	May 3
Semi- Structured Interview	May 6	May 20	May 27
2 Full Days	May 9-10	May 23-24	May 30-31
1 afternoon session-Story lesson	May 11	May 25	June 1
2 morning observations	May 12-13	May 26-27	June 2-3
Follow up visit to confirm data	June 10	June 13	June 14

During the two full day sessions all lessons on the Grade R schedule were observed such as early morning ring, school readiness, free play, movement and drama activities, music ring and story ring.

#### **4.6.1 Semi-Structured Interviews**

The use of semi-structured, one-on-one interviews was an important and valuable method of direct data collection and was most suitable to gain data on teachers' beliefs and understandings and the challenges they faced. According to Hatch (2002, p. 91) interviews are used to uncover the meaning structures that participants use to organise their experiences. This data collection strategy enabled me to address my research question and to gain a detailed picture of the teachers' knowledge, beliefs and perceptions about pedagogy in Grade R. Cohen et al. (2007, p. 351) described an interview as "a two-person conversation initiated by the interviewer for the specific purpose of obtaining research relevant information, and focused by him on content specified by research objectives of systematic description, prediction or explanation." The structure of the interview questions in this research was informed by guidelines detailed by Hatch (2002, p. 106). The guidelines listed below were used to develop the interview questions:

- The question should be open ended. This enables free subjective expression of experience and avoids implying direction;
- The question should be clearly stated. This avoids cross communication and allows for transparency of intention;

- The question should use language that is familiar to the participants; and
- The question should respect participant's subject knowledge.

My interview schedule (refer to Appendix D) outlined the broad categories that were relevant to this study. Teachers were interviewed on a variety of themes related to their beliefs and practices e.g. philosophy, aims, approach to teaching, understanding of young children, methods of teaching, notions of learning, planning, monitoring, assessment techniques, classroom management, resources availability and curriculum differentiation for a multi-cultural and inclusive environment. The schedule included main questions, additional questions, throw-away questions and probing questions (Berg, 2001, p. 75). Conducting interviews requires some necessary personal and technical skills as they demand a degree of professionalism which does not come easily. According to Oppenheim (1992, p. 65) interpersonal skills are putting the respondent at ease, asking questions in an interested manner, noting down the responses without upsetting the conversational flow and giving support without introducing bias. As a novice interviewer these demanding aspects relating to interview techniques were very challenging. I familiarised myself with literature on interview techniques to gain some 'hands-on' experience of this research tool.

I made prior appointments with each teacher for the interviews (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 103). The teachers preferred being interviewed after school. Even though I had prior consent, before each interview, I confirmed with each of the participants if they were still willing to participate (Creswell, 2007, p. 132). All the teachers agreed to be part of the study. The use of a voice recorder did not seem to elicit any mistrust and none of the teachers had a problem with their interview being recorded as I assured them of anonymity and confidentiality in the data presentation. In addition, the use of a voice recorder proved to be invaluable as it provided relief from extensive writing and allowed me to concentrate better. It also made possible the verbatim record of the interview for valid and meaningful analysis (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 103). However, I took some notes during the interviews in order to capture certain points or ask for clarification. Transcriptions of the interviews were done by me as there are two advantages of this: Firstly, transcribing the first interview allowed me to observe myself in action and pinpoint weaknesses to be improved on for the next round of interviews. Second, as transcribing the

interview takes considerable time, it encourages detailed reflection on the issues of the research (Ezzy 2002, p. 70).

Cohen et al. (2007) noted that the interview method as a research technique has both advantages and disadvantages. One of the advantages is that it allows for greater depth than is the case with other methods of data collection such as surveys. The disadvantage is that it is prone to subjectivity and bias on the part of the interviewer. To avoid this and to ensure credibility, I triangulated my data (Cohen et al., 2007). I transcribed the voice recordings after they had taken place, and analysed the responses. In order to clarify each participant's responses and to enhance the credibility of the study, I used member checking by providing each participant with a draft copy of the transcript. I asked the participants to read their transcripts to ensure authenticity.

#### **4.6.2 Observation**

Observations are valuable in answering the question related to how understandings shape practice as it is a very useful tool for gaining insight (Cohen et al., 2007, p. 412). Marshal & Rossman (2006, p. 99) maintained that "observation is a fundamental and highly important method in all qualitative inquiry." Cohen et al. (2007, p. 396) pointed out that the distinctive feature of observation as a research process is that it offers an investigator the opportunity to gather 'live' data from naturally occurring social situations.

In this study, direct observation as the data collection method was carried out as this enabled me to observe the nature of practice in the Grade R classrooms first hand. The researcher's role during the observation was being there but not involved (non-participant). A great advantage of employing this technique is its directness, as the researcher does not need to ask people's opinion, but watch what they do and listen to what they say (Robson, 2002, p. 314). I observed the teachers, their interactions and the interactive space. Observation of the teachers' practices to see if it linked with their beliefs were closely observed using a pre-planned observation schedule which served as a guide to ensure that I was consistent in my observations in all three research sites (refer to Appendix E). Using the definition of pedagogy by Siraj-Blatchford et al. (2002), the classroom interactions, learning environment and engagement with the community was carefully observed. Findings from studies on effective pedagogy guided the observation schedule. Vygotskian tools for analysis also

guided the observation schedule such as the search for scaffolding, use of language, resources and the cultural context of the classroom. Through observation I gathered a range of data that included the physical setting, human setting, interaction contexts, and programme setting, all of which were pertinent in understanding the research focus (Patton, 2002, p. 264). In addition to completing the observation schedule, field notes were written to help take stock of the data as field notes are known to be the best aids to memory (Werner & Schoepfle, 1987). Within this observation, I played two roles: the role of a passive member of the group, so the patterns of behaviour are less disrupted and the role of an active observer in order to gather as many details as possible about the context of the observation (Aubrey, David, Godfrey, & Thompson, 2000).

Each teacher was observed for five consecutive days at each site in order to get a comprehensive understanding. I observed each teacher during naturally occurring activities that were part of Grade R daily schedule. The main skills required by the researcher for successful observation is to be careful not to formulate judgements prematurely as well to ensure that the observed feels supported and not threatened (Hopkins, 2002). To reduce the effects of my presence on the participants, and to orientate the participants to my presence, I sometimes made observations at different intervals of the day. In addition, during the first visit I took the time to establish rapport and trust by interacting with the teachers freely and socialising with the children during their break time, as a way of desensitizing them to my presence (Rolfe, 2001, p. 230; Creswell, 2002, p. 201). One of the weaknesses associated with observations noted by Cohen et al. (2007, p. 411) is that participants may change their behaviour if they know that they are being observed. However, after the first visit the teachers and learners were quite relaxed in my presence as I tried to be as unobtrusive as possible by remaining at the back of the classroom. Moreover, it was found that the participants and the children in the classes showed little interest, especially when I avoided any overt interaction and did not intrude during lessons (Rolfe, 2001, p. 230).

#### **4.6.3 Document Review**

According to Walker (1985, p. 64) document analysis is the analysis of documents in order to gather facts. Documents reveal what people do or did or are guided by. Since these

documents have their origin in everyday contexts and there is no contact between the researcher and the production of the investigation material, document analysis is an essential method of research as neither the researcher nor the aim of the investigation has any influence on the material itself (Walker, 1985). In order to understand the tools used to support practice and to supplement information obtained, a documentary analysis was undertaken. Policy files, planning files, timetables, teacher support materials and assessment documents were examined.

#### **4.7 Data Management, Storage and Protection**

Huberman & Miles (1994) argued that “A good storage and retrieval system is critical for keeping track of what data is available ...” (p. 428). The data generated during this research process consisted of the following:

- Audio recordings of the semi structured interviews;
- Completed Interview transcripts;
- Field notes in a personal notebook taken during observation sessions;
- Documents such as lesson plans, assessments and reports collected as evidence; and
- Observation schedule completed during the observation sessions.

These records were divided into two categories: Tangible Evidence and Data Files. Tangible Evidence such as the documents collected were clearly labelled, placed in a box for easy access and stored in a secure place. Data Files such as the interview transcripts were stored on the researcher’s computer. Well organised file names and folder structures made it easier to find and keep track of data files. The Data files were protected through the use of a unique user ID and passwords that cannot be easily guessed. Regular backups were made to prevent any loss of data.

#### **4.8 Data Analysis**

According to Mouton (2001, p. 108), the aim of analysis is to understand the different elements to ones data and to identify patterns or themes in the data. This entails organising the data to enable the identification of recurring patterns and make informed interpretations. Analysis in this research study looked at themes and patterns that emerged from the enormous raw data that was collected in order to produce a meaningful and trustworthy

conclusion that was supported by evidence as to how it was reached. I employed different analytic strategies such as organising, sorting and reducing the data so that it was manageable. I then reassembled the data in order to interpret it (Schwandt, 2007, p. 7). This research had no predetermined outcomes. At first I organised and presented the data analysis according to the individual teachers in each of the three case studies. I considered responses of each individual before proceeding to the next individual or teacher case. This helped me “preserve the coherence and integrity of the individual’s response” and to look at the whole picture of the case study (Cohen et al., 2007, p. 467). After carefully considering each teacher’s cases, I then reflected upon the issues that emerged across the individuals in order to find themes, patterns of responses, similarities and differences to compare the issues raised by each teacher. De Vos (2002, p. 340) stated "Qualitative data analysis is a search for general statements about relationships among categories of data." In addition to analysing the interview transcripts, data from the observation schedules for each teacher was scrutinised and coded to match the emerging themes. I began breaking down the whole corpus of data (observation schedule notes and interview transcriptions) by categorising and coding the individual segments and establishing a pattern for the whole data by relating the codes to one another (Schwandt 2007, p. 7). I read the data line by line and substantive codes (concepts) were identified and given a name. Comparisons of differences and similarities between different substantive codes were made continuously to ensure that codes with similar content were given the same labels. In the process of clustering codes with similar meaning, descriptive categories were formed. I felt assured that my analysis was thorough in the context of each teacher case as well as cross-case analysis while in search of meaningful interpretations (Creswell 2007, p. 75). In addition evidence from the documents reviewed was used to substantiate some of the findings in this study. I rigorously followed the analytical procedure proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006) for data analysis as summarised in Table 4.2



**Table 4.2: Phases of Thematic Analysis**

	<b>Phase</b>	<b>Description of the process</b>
1	Familiarising yourself with your data	Transcribing data (if necessary), reading and re-reading the data, noting down initial ideas.
2	Generating initial codes	Coding interesting features of the data in a systematic fashion across the entire data set, collating data relevant to each code.
3	Searching for themes	Collating codes into potential themes, gathering all data relevant to each potential theme.
4	Reviewing themes	Checking if the themes work in relation to the coded extract and the entire data set, generating a thematic ‘map’ of the analysis.
5	Defining and naming themes	On-going analysis to refine the specifics of each theme, and the overall story the analysis tells, generating clear definitions and names for each theme.
6	Producing the report	The final opportunity for analysis. Selection of vivid, compelling extract examples, final analysis of selected extracts, relating back to the analysis of the research questions and literature, producing an academic report of the analysis.

Braun & Clarke (2006, p. 86) explained the nature of thematic analysis by pointing out that it “involves a constant moving back and forward between the entire data set, the coded extracts that you are analysing, and the analysis of the data that you are producing. Writing is an integral part of analysis, not something that takes place at the end, as it does with statistical analyses.”

During this phase of my study, I always tried to ensure that my analysis was rigorous, disciplined, systematic, carefully documented and methodical (Schwandt, 2007, p. 6). I

strictly adhered to the four criteria of trustworthiness for research studies, which were that the data should be credible, transferable, dependable, and confirmable (Schwandt, 2007, p. 299). I accurately related the beliefs of the three participant teachers' using the transcribed interviews. I enlisted the help of critical friends to help me ascertain perspectives on the data. The teachers also had an opportunity to look at the data and assist with analysis. I reinforced confidentiality and anonymity to secure valid data. I ensured that the process of data collection and analysis was logical, traceable and carefully documented. I sought to accurately link my findings, interpretations and assertions of the data to the evidence. Mindful of this, it is worth stating that this research study was as much about my own personal learning as it was about making a difference through the study outcomes. If achieving rigour is about "substantial personal commitment to engage extensively and thoughtfully with participants or data" (Smith, 2008, p. 248), then this analytical phase received my conscientious attention. I summarised the data and presented all three participants' responses in detail in Chapter Five of this study. I do not present the data using a case-by-case design because the themes and nuances that emerged from all teachers were similar. Consequently, I present integrated findings on data rather than individual cases (Yin, 2003, pp. 111-112).

#### **4.9 Validity and Reliability**

Patton (2002) argued that validity and reliability are two factors which any qualitative researcher should be concerned about while designing a study, analysing results and judging the quality of the study. The credibility of research relates to its validity. It questions if the research successfully achieved its intentions in a believable and ethical manner. Willig (2001, p. 16) establishes validity as the "extent to which the research describes, measures or explains what it aims to describe, measure or explain." I used the process of validation to assess the accuracy of my findings as Johnson & Christensen (2004, p. 207) defined research validity as qualitative research that is "plausible, credible, trustworthy, and therefore defensible." To ensure credibility, I used thick descriptions to provide a feeling of the setting, as Denzin & Lincoln (2000, p. 393) maintained that the description of people, places and events is important in qualitative research. The triangulation method was used to strengthen the validity and reliability of this research. Patton (2002) advocated the use of triangulation and stated that triangulation strengthens a study by combining methods. According to

O'Donoghue & Punch (2003, p. 13), triangulation is a "method of cross-checking data from multiple sources to search for regularities in the research data." Triangulation is essentially a strategy for improving the validity and reliability of research or evaluation of findings (Mathison, 1988). Triangulation was achieved by engaging multiple methods of data collection, such as, observation, interviews and document analysis as this led to a more valid and reliable understanding of teachers' beliefs and practices. I also used mechanical means to record data as the interviews were audio taped. The participants were also asked to read their interview transcripts to ensure authenticity. The rigorous application of these processes ensured that the findings in this research study are reliable and valid.

#### **4.10 Ethical Considerations**

I applied for and received ethics clearance from the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN) prior to commencing the data collection phase of this study (refer to Appendix B). In addition permission was also sought from the KZN Department of Education to conduct the study (refer to Appendix A). Several ethical considerations were employed throughout this research study. Cohen, Manion & Morrison (2000, p. 49) stated that at any stage during research, issues relating to ethics could materialise. Using the ethical code of conduct for UKZN, I paid attention to the following:

##### **4.10.1 Voluntary Participation and Informed Consent**

This study was guided by voluntary participation and informed consent. Informed consent was sought in order to protect the participants' right to freedom of choice (Cohen et al., 2007, p. 52). According to Willig (2001, p. 18) participants should be fully informed about the research procedures and give their consent to participate in the research. I negotiated directly with the principals, governing bodies and each individual teacher for their participation. I explained the purpose of the study, and ensured that they understood the nature of the research. I repeatedly explained that participation was voluntary and assured them that they could choose to withdraw from the study at any time. I handed them the Letter of Informed Consent and explained its contents (refer to Appendix C1 & C2). Thereafter I ensured that they all signed the informed consent forms (Silverman, 2005, p. 258; Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 48).

#### **4.10.2 Confidentiality**

Willig (2001, p. 18) stated that confidentiality regarding information about participants learned during the research process is obligatory. I guaranteed the confidentiality of the participants by using pseudonyms (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 50). Privacy according to Cohen et al. (2000, p. 61) can be approached in three ways: (i) the sensitivity of the information being given, (ii) the setting that is being observed, and (iii) the dissemination of information. Therefore, the participants' identities and personal details have been kept out of this research presentation as I assured the participants that I would protect their right to privacy.

#### **4.10.3 Deception in Research**

I ensured that my study is free from participation deception or any form of deceit, duress or unfair inducement or manipulation (Berg, 2001, p. 56; Willig, 2001, p. 18). Merriam (1998, p. 219) noted “The best a researcher can do is to be conscious of the ethical issues that pervade the research process and to examine his or her own philosophical orientation vis-a-vis these issues.” I ensured that all ethical procedures were strictly adhered to so that the results of my research would be affirmed and made more credible.

#### **4.11 Limitations of the Study**

Since only three teachers participated in this research study, the findings are limited and conclusions might not be generalisable to all Grade R teachers. However, some readers might identify with certain experiences of the study findings. Using more participants might have given more varied conclusions.

#### **4.12 Conclusion**

This chapter provided a comprehensive discussion of the research design and the methods used to produce the data. In addition, I described the data collection and analysis procedures I employed, as well as the strategies used to ensure validity. This chapter culminated in a description of ethical considerations and the limitations of the study. In the next chapter research findings arriving out of this methodology is discussed.

## Chapter 5: Findings: Presentation and Discussion

### 5.1 Introduction

The key is curiosity, and it is curiosity, not answers that we model. As we seek to know more about a child, we demonstrate the acts of observing, listening, questioning and wondering. When we are curious about a child's words and our responses to those words, the child feels respected. "What are the ideas that I have that are so interesting to the teacher? I must be somebody with good ideas." (Vivian Paley, 1986)<sup>17</sup>

Vivian Paley is a retired pre-school teacher who used the stories children told in her classroom as lessons for teaching. The children in her classrooms felt valued, respected and enjoyed sharing. In this study we are curious about teachers' beliefs. What are the ideas and stories that they have to share about teaching and learning? To be effective, educators must be respected as professionals for the valuable contributions they make to society. In this study teacher contributions are acknowledged and valued. By sharing their ideas, beliefs and stories during the data collection process, teachers in this study had an opportunity to reflect on various aspects of their teaching. Teachers' personal beliefs and theories about pedagogy are widely considered to play a central role in their teaching practices (Kagan, 1992; Pajares, 1992; Ball, 1996; Handal & Herrington, 2003). However, the exact nature of the relationship between teachers' beliefs and their instructional behaviours is unclear (Buzeika, 1996). Teachers' stated beliefs and observed practices related to pedagogy were explored in the collection of qualitative data.

This chapter presents findings and analyses of the case study, which was conducted to explore the beliefs and practices of three Grade R teachers, within a context of effective pedagogy in three different schools over a period of one month. According to Mouton (2001, p. 108), the aim of analysis is to understand the different elements of one's data and to identify patterns or themes in the data. This involved organising the data to enable the identification of recurring patterns and make informed interpretations (explained in chapter Four). The discussions presented in this chapter respond to my research question. In the following sections, I introduce the research participants and present the themes that emerged in the data analysis phase. In addition, I present and discuss my findings of the study. This

---

<sup>17</sup> Paley, V. (1986). -Vivian Paley is an American preschool and kindergarten teacher and early childhood education researcher.

chapter presents the accumulated evidence of the analyses and arguments about selected Grade R teachers' beliefs and practices.

## 5.2 Introducing the Research Participants

Table 5.1 provides an overview of the three Grade R teacher participants. It lists their pseudonym, gender, age, ethnicity, professional qualifications, the number of years of teaching experience, the different grades taught as well as the number of learners in each of their classes.

**Table 5.1 Research Participants**

PARTICIPANT CODE	GUGU SCHOOL A	NICKY SCHOOL B	AMY SCHOOL C
Age	37 years	34 years	30 years
Gender	Female	Female	Female
Ethnic Group	Black	White	Coloured
Professional Qualifications	Educare Certificate	B.Ed-Degree Foundation Phase	Two year Montessori Certificate Course
Experience	9 years	12 years	7 years
Grades Taught	Grade 00 and Grade R	Grade 1 and Grade R	Grade 00and Grade R
Number of learners in class	25	22	43

The three teachers are located in different state schools in Durban and the surrounding areas. A description of each of their schools was provided in Chapter Three. All three teachers in the study come from different ethnic backgrounds. The most striking observation is that Amy has a large number of learners in comparison to Nicky and Gugu. Another sharp contrast is that Nicky is the only teacher who is qualified with a Foundation Phase teaching degree. Both Gugu and Amy were under-qualified.<sup>18</sup> The research study looked at whether these factors affected teacher beliefs and practices in the Grade R classrooms.

<sup>18</sup> These teachers are classified as under-qualified because their qualifications do not meet the requirements for Relative Education Qualification Values (REQV) 14 which is matric + 4 years.

### 5.3 Research Themes

In depth analyses provided five broad conceptual themes, in an attempt to address the research question. The research themes that emerged were as follows:

- The first theme that emerged related to beliefs about the learning environment. It addressed teachers' beliefs on the effects of a positive outdoor and indoor environment, classroom arrangement, learning centres and resources required.
- The second theme addressed teachers' beliefs and perceptions relating to teaching strategies and classroom management approaches used in the classroom. It reports on the capabilities of children in Grade R; how they learn optimally and the types of activities they need to learn. It considered the adaptations needed to cater for children from diverse background. It addition, it highlights the use of interactive, co-operative, discovery and play-based learning strategies, the use of the chalkboard and worksheets, and other activities done in the classroom. Classroom management styles, positive reinforcement and the establishment of rules are also addressed.
- Theme three addresses beliefs concerning planning, curriculum and professional development. It reports on how planning is done according to a Grade R schedule and how curriculum needs are catered for. It also highlights areas in which teachers feel they need guidance.
- Theme four addresses beliefs and perceptions held on assessment. It addressed the value of assessment in Grade R and the types of assessment techniques employed.
- Theme five, the final theme, related to beliefs concerning parental involvement and whether their roles influence pedagogy in a Grade R classroom.

## **5.4 Research Findings**

### **5.4.1 Theme 1- Learning Environment**

Outdoor and indoor learning environments should be motivating and inviting to all children, so that they are encouraged and helped to explore and to use all the possibilities offered for fun, adventure, challenge and creativity (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA), 2004, p. 54). A rich and varied environment supports children's learning and development. It gives them the confidence to explore and learn in secure and safe, yet challenging indoor and outdoor spaces (Early years Foundation Stage Statutory Framework, 2008, pp. 33-36). The environment plays a key role in supporting children's learning and development. The aim must be to provide an environment that inspires "an eagerness to explore and a zest for learning" (Drake, 2001, p. 1). The beliefs and practices of all three research participants regarding the learning environment was explored to yield insights into how pedagogy is framed in Grade R classes.

#### **5.4.1.1 Beliefs and Practices on the Indoor Learning Environment**

When asked about the importance of creating a positive indoor learning environment all three participants believed that the classroom environment played an important role in promoting children's learning and should be friendly and relaxed. They mentioned that children spent a great deal of time in the classroom and teachers should make the physical environment of classrooms as comfortable and cheerful as possible in order to facilitate learning. In their definition of pedagogy Siraj-Blatchford et al. (2002) stated that pedagogy refers to the interactive processes between teacher and learner and to the learning environment which includes the physical learning environment. Gugu stated that she was guided on arranging the classroom environment by her principal:

*I sit on a child's chair as my principal says I have to be at the children's level and talk to them at their level and not above their heads. There is no teacher's desk. Everything in the class is the children's size. All the equipment is stored on low shelves and children can help themselves and return equipment when they are finished using it. There is no chalkboard. I write on a small board used by the children if I want to explain something (May, 6, 2011).*



Amy held similar beliefs to Gugu and commented that the classroom should be a child-centred environment that children can relate in order for them to express themselves easily. Nicky mentioned: *“It must be an inviting, supportive, and safe environment where a child feels welcome. You want them to love coming to school, because it is a happy place with numerous fun activities that encourage active involvement”* (May, 20, 2011). Bulkeley & Fabian (2006, p. 20) commented that the whole learning environment, should be structured to be learner friendly and encourage active involvement which is consistent with the views of all three teacher participants. In addition the EPPE study found that classrooms with warm, supportive and relaxed environments, with a welcoming appearance are some of the characteristics of effective pre-schools (Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2003).

Teachers’ beliefs on the importance of creating display tables and putting up posters in this study were unanimous that they do have an educational value. They believed that a classroom that was attractive and well-organised with a variety learning displays contributed towards children’s cognitive, creative and social development. Gugu and Nicky believed that a display table was important and should be changed according to the themes adopted for the year. At the core of Vygotsky's theory, is the idea that child development is the result of the interactions between children and their environment which is consistent with comments made by the teachers (Vygotsky, 1978). Nicky said: *“It sets up social interaction and social learning just by them picking up books and looking at charts and pictures. They love sharing their knowledge and talking about their experiences as they look at the display”* (May, 20, 2011). Amy believed that charts, displays and pictures are necessary; however, she added that even though she believed that a display table was important, her class was a bit too small to accommodate one. Gugu and Nicky believed that a Grade R class must have a weather and birthday chart which was used every morning during circle time. Nicky mentioned that a classroom had to be bright and colourful, with a variety of charts, pictures, posters, and different resources or mediums that are relevant the learners. This belief is consistent with findings of researchers and authors who mention that environmental print enhances children’s literacy (Gordon & Browne, 2000, p. 481; Kostelnik, Soderman & Whiren, 2004, p. 311; Seefeldt & Wasik, 2006, p. 211). Vygotsky also emphasised the importance of cultural tools such as pictures and charts to develop children’s higher mental capabilities (Dolya & Palmer, 2004, p. 2). Gugu, however, mentioned that in the past she used to have posters, a number

frieze, colour chart and phonic frieze on the wall which she believed was important, but her principal made her remove all of this:

*My principal has asked us to take away these references as she says children must discover and think on their own and not have too much given to them. My principal says that posters are NOT to be put up as permanent 'wall paper' and then become background scenery (May, 6, 2011).*

This corresponds with Wang et al.'s (2008, p. 244) research study on differences between Chinese and American teacher beliefs and practices who found that a teacher sample sometimes changed their teaching plans and methods to reflect their directors' beliefs.

Nicky and Amy believed that charts are vital in a Grade R classroom and serve as tools for learning. Nicky mentioned:

*We do have numbers and colour charts as well as phonic friezes but they are only put up after we have covered a concept. It is great reference material to reinforce learning. Children learn well through this visual medium and we use it as tools which we constantly refer to on a regular basis. They are just not there for display but have a very educational value (May, 20, 2011).*

Amy said:

*We tend to discuss things using displays and posters. Children need visual images in order to learn. I have a number of second language learners and visual representation is essential to help them grasp concepts or ideas. Charts and posters are important as they are used to revise concepts. Every morning I revise numbers, colours, and shapes by pointing to the charts and the children read after me (May, 27, 2011).*

When asked to comment on the importance of displaying learners' work, all three participants believed that it boosts a child's self-esteem and makes them feel valued. Nicky mentioned:

*As teachers, we value what children do. This is their classroom as much as ours. It is important that you don't just choose a few that look nice, you put up everyone's work. They always look on the wall and they ask "Oh where's mine. OH there it is." They show this display to their parents when they come to drop them off.—"Look there's*

*my work.” It makes them feel proud of their achievements (May, 20, 2011).*

Amy articulated: *They even ask if you are going to put it up. They know exactly where their work is displayed. Although sometimes I don't even put their names on their work but they know which is theirs. It makes them feel good and boosts their self-esteem (May, 27, 2011).*

Gugu said: *When you display their work you make children feel special (May, 6, 2011).*

All three participants in the study believed that resources are essential and make learning more meaningful. They valued the use of resources to enhance learning as they believed that children in Grade R need to feel, taste, smell, see and do in order to learn. Gugu and Nicky mentioned that they were fortunate to have a number of resources that had been collected over the years, whereas Amy commented that resources were limited but she often asked learners to bring in waste material. Amy said: *“I ask for buttons, tin caps, ice cream sticks which they count with, I even get parents to bring in old clothes, shoes, hand bags for fantasy area” (May, 27, 2011).* All three participants articulated that they often improvised and are very creative in using recycled material. Nicky, however, added that she made a number of her own resources as well, but the most profound comment made by her was that the teacher was by far the best resource in the classroom:

*It is very important to have sufficient resources but the teacher is by far the best resource. You can have all the resources you could possibly need but if you as the teacher do not know how to incorporate it into meaningful learning experiences then it would be useless (May, 20, 2011).*

When asked to comment on their beliefs on the need for different learning centres such as play areas, book corner, fantasy corner and art area, all three participants believed that it was important to have a variety of learning centres. Gugu and Nicky mentioned that they did not have free standing corners in their classrooms but their schools had plenty of space where areas are set up for arts and craft, fantasy play, and construction toys which are used during free play. Gugu and Nicky believed that a variety of centres encouraged learning through play. They believed that learning centres are set up to encourage children to make choices. They acknowledged that as children work in the centres they learn to work independently as

well as cooperatively. Nicky was quite vocal in her belief that a variety of centres was important but the teacher was the catalyst who sets up these centres constructively:

*The outdoor area helps develop gross motor muscles. Block play and construction manipulative play help with brain development. The creative area with play dough, painting, cutting etc. helps develop a creative flair and fine motor muscles. The book corner fosters a love for books and reading even though they cannot read the words they can read using pictures. Having all those media available to them is vital as it helps develop children holistically, physically, intellectually, creatively and emotionally. Children just don't play with one thing all the time, some will spend half an hour in one area and some will spend five minutes in an area. They need a variety of things to stimulate them so we the teachers need to be the catalysts, we have to find the materials needed for each learning centre environment to ensure it encourages children to play in these areas and it caters for their individual learning styles (May, 20, 2011).*

This belief is consistent with the view that young children require sensorial stimulation for their overall development (Broadhead, 2001, p. 34; Seefeldt & Wasik, 2006, pp. 16-17). In addition Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory is concerned with children's learning in context and stresses that the mental representation of symbolic actions and objects through play provides a major stimulus to their cognitive development (Vygotsky, 1978). Children respond to the reality they see around them and what they learn reflects that reality (Penn, 2005). Therefore, the creation of a stimulating learning environment with a variety of learning centres as advocated by Gugu and Nicky, is vital in creating a context for meaningful learning.

Amy believed that it is very important to have different learning centres in a class. She said: *"children know that we do specific things in that corner and they can go to the corner that they like. They know that each thing has its place. They know that if they have a book it has a home and it must go back to the book corner"* (May, 27, 2011). However, she added that as much as she valued having different learning centres, it was difficult to find the time or materials needed for a learning centre environment. She commented that centres required space which was not available in her classroom as she had 43 learners. She added that she

was overwhelmed by the number of learners in her classroom and felt that if she set up centres outside the class she would not be able to monitor them easily as it would be too scattered, chaotic and time consuming. She mentioned that she had some fantasy resources and paints but they were in a box and used for individual choice and free play when time was available.

Observations (see section A, Appendix E) revealed that Nicky had a classroom that was thoughtfully designed to optimise small and larger group interaction, social learning and constructive play. The space was well defined for children to guide their exploration and invite social and cognitive experiences. Specific aspects of the classroom environment included a meeting space for group gathering and construction play as well as a reading corner. The classrooms of both Gugu and Nicky were organised with materials clearly labelled and with pictures and words stored at the child's level to encourage maximum independence. Both teachers were fortunate to have specialized spaces that are shared by all the classrooms during free play. There was an aesthetic space for focused experiences utilizing creative materials, a construction area for blocks and other building materials, dramatic play area and a large outdoor play and garden area. The EPPE study (Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2002) found that effective pre-schools had fairly good resources which were clearly visible in both learning environments. Both Gugu and Nicky made the classroom activities more meaningful by situating them in an authentic context.<sup>19</sup> For example, learners improved their oral language and communication skills by participating in role play such as being mum or a doctor in the dramatic play centre. Both teachers were able to accommodate for active and quiet activities (e.g. the library area for children wanting to read alone, whereas the block and construction area encouraged lots of movement and activity).

Their classroom layouts were consistent with the Reggio Emilio Educational Approach and philosophy which insists that children learn readily from their environment, and therefore the environment is the 'third' teacher (Edwards, Gandini, & Forman, 1993). In this approach the importance of the environment lies in the belief that children can best create meaning and make sense of their world through environments which support complex, varied, sustained,

---

<sup>19</sup> An example of an authentic context is one in which the activity is typically used in real life e.g. role play mum.

and changing relationships between people, the world of experience, ideas and the many ways of expressing ideas (Gandini, 1998, p. 177). This was clearly visible as children in Gugu's and Nicky's classes had a variety of opportunities to be active and initiate their own learning. The High/Scope Educational Research Foundation (2001) suggested that the learning space should be inviting for children and organised into well-defined areas of interest to encourage distinctive types of play. Hohmann and Weikart (1995, p. 113) noted that the interest areas must be arranged to promote visibility and easy movement between areas and must be flexible enough to accommodate children's changing interests. These statements were consistent with the practices of both Gugu and Nicky. A variety of construction toys, educational toys, cars, dolls, creative materials, puzzles, games were available for the learners to use in their classes during free play. Observing the children's creative use of these materials during free play reflected observations by Mallaguzi, (in Gandini, 1998, p.75), that creativity arises not out of the extraordinary, but of daily experiences that children have to engage freely.

Observation of Amy's classroom revealed that the arrangement and organisation was not as conducive to learning when compared to the other two classes. The teacher attributed the large numbers in the classroom and the lack of space as a constraint that hindered a more learner friendly arrangement. Even though Amy believed that different learning centres were important for quality teaching and learning, she could not implement it in practice, due to a lack of space and resources. In her classroom, no reading corner or construction area was observed. The layout of the classroom did not cater for learning in different centres. Physical learning environments, as Siraj-Blatchford et al. (2003) suggested, should provide opportunity for the children to be active and to begin to take the initiative to learn which was not possible at this site. In Amy's class it seemed that insufficient space had a negative impact on practical activity, as it meant there was little space for some activities, i.e. drama corner, art corner and construction or block play, in order to deliver all areas of the Grade R curriculum evenly.

The displays in each classroom (see section A, Appendix E) were quite varied with Nicky's and Amy's classes having a balance of resource charts and learners' work displayed on the walls which contrasted with Gugu's class which largely had a display of learners' work on

the walls. Nicky had a display table on the current sea theme laid out in her classroom, allowing regular access. Children were observed interacting with objects and books on the table. In Gugu's school the theme table was available in the school entrance as all the classes in the school focused on the same theme, but access to the table was limited. A variety of resources were available and used regularly in the classes of Nicky and Gugu. Children in both classes actively engaged with the resources available. Amy had limited resources available to her but in her interview she did indicate that she improvised and used waste and recycled material in her lessons. However, this was not observed in practice. Opportunities to use easily available resources that required no finances were often lacking in Amy's lessons especially in school readiness activities and circle time.

The quality of the indoor learning environment in both Gugu's and Nicky's classes resembled effective pedagogy contexts that allowed for a balance between child initiated and teacher directed activities (Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2002). However, the quality of the learning environment in Amy's class was not as conducive, as the learning environment was teacher directed with few opportunities available for child initiated activities. However, all three classrooms despite their varied indoor learning environments had a warm, friendly atmosphere with happy, lively and expressive children, which was consistent with all three participants' beliefs that the learning environment must be relaxed, friendly and cheerful.

#### **5.4.1.2 Outdoor Learning Environment**

When asked to comment on the importance of making use of available outdoor resources to enrich learning, all three participants recognised the need for outside play and the value of the outside environment to young children's learning. They believed that outdoor environments gave children opportunities to play on a larger scale, enabling them to develop the physical skills and control necessary for future learning. From the interviews conducted all three participants believed the outdoor environments helped learners develop physically, emotionally and socially. Elkind (2007) substantiates this belief as he argued that play provides benefits for cognitive, social, emotional, physical, and moral development. Nicky said: "*We find today that a number of children need occupational therapy because they have not been exposed to a variety of outdoor experiences or sensory integration which develop their muscles and spatial orientation.*" She mentioned that many children are entertained by

television, video games, and computers and very little time was spent exercising their minds, bodies, and emotions. Both Gugu and Nicky believed that when children are using outdoor resources, it helps with developing muscle tone<sup>20</sup> and co-ordination<sup>21</sup>.

All three participants mentioned in their interviews that sometimes they used the outdoors to teach specific lessons especially movement, developmental play, sand play for writing and drawing in sand, and water play when they were teaching capacity. The statement by Esbensen (1987, p. 10) that “The early childhood playground should be an extension of the classroom” is testimony to their beliefs. Gugu and Nicky also commented that they were fortunate to have a huge outdoor and garden area where children learnt to plant in the vegetable patch, and watched the plants grow and in this way they were learning scientific knowledge incidentally. Harris (1996, p. 122) substantiates this belief when he mentioned that “playing is learning, and outdoor play opens up a vast array of learning experiences.”

All three participants believed that children learnt a variety of social skills from each other such as learning to share, play, respect each other, take turns and be patient. Gugu said “*They wait to play on the slide, take turns, and follow rules.*” This is consistent with the statements of Jalongo, Fennimore, Pattnaik, Laverick, Brewster, & Mutuku, (2004, p. 144) who suggested that “space and materials for pre-schoolers should enhance socialness” and Vygotsky (1978) who noted that through play, a child learns to exercise self-control, while developing empathy for others.

When asked to comment about the importance of supervision during free play and outdoor activities in their interviews, all three teachers believed that supervision was necessary as they were committed to the safety and well-being of their learners. They articulated that children needed to be watched at all times and sometimes they needed guidance with their social skills. According to Amy: “*I have 43 learners and I have to supervise them every day. I find that there are too many of them. Sometimes they get hurt or fight with each other and I have to help them or intervene*” (May, 27, 2011).

---

<sup>20</sup> Muscle tone is important with concentration as it enables children to sit upright. Children with low tone tend to be restless and fidgety (Jenkinson, Hyde, & Ahmad, 2002).

<sup>21</sup> Co- ordination refers to the harmonious functioning of muscles or groups of muscles in the execution of movements such as writing (Jenkinson, Hyde, & Ahmad, 2002).



Nicky was the only participant who believed that outdoor supervision is more than just watching over children and that there are many teaching opportunities during this time:

*The teacher can give play ideas like “why don’t we use these blocks to build a rocket?” “Why don’t you play with so and so and do it together?” “Why don’t you try using the swings today” It shows them a way of constructive play. Sometimes they need help with their social play. They may have disagreements with friends and they need intervention. You get them to see what they did wrong and explain why that was not acceptable and you get them to see it from their friend’s point of view. (May 20, 2011).*

This belief is consistent with findings from the EPPE study which found that 'excellent' settings adopted discipline or behaviour policies that involved staff who helped children in rationalising and talking through their conflicts (Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2003). Vygotsky (1978) also emphasised that through play children learnt social and problem solving skills.

Notes from the observation schedules (see section B, Appendix E2) revealed that both Gugu and Nicky created supportive outdoor learning environments which were structured in their daily routines especially during free play, movement and developmental play activities. Both schools had large, well equipped outdoor areas which offered a variety of activities for the learners to become involved in. It was clearly visible that within this supportive environment, each child's optimal development took place in the four domains: social, physical, cognitive and emotional. Both Gugu and Nicky supervised the learners as they played freely on the jungle gym, slides, climbed ropes, ran on the grass, and played with sand and water. It was clearly evident that the beliefs articulated by Gugu and Nicky were consistent with their practice as their outdoor provision was well organised. Ouvry (2010, p. 4) stated that “It takes courage as a practitioner to let children try out their growing powers.” Movement is vital for growth and requires space (Ouvry, 2010). Both Gugu and Nicky provided numerous opportunities for growth and movement in a spacious, safe, secure, supportive and caring outdoor environment which is a characteristic of effective pedagogic environments in the EPPE study ((Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2003).

Amy, however, made limited use of the outdoor environment which comprised of two swings, one slide and a climbing rope to cater for 43 learners. A sand tray was visible, but it had no sand in it. The only time the children were observed playing in the outdoor area was when it was break time. This practice is inconsistent with studies on effective pedagogy as the Action Alliance for Children (2007) states: “play is not a break from the curriculum; play is the best way to implement the curriculum” (p. 2). In addition, Ovury (2010, p. 4) commented that “We can't allow this powerful, challenging and naturally fun-giving opportunity of being outdoors to be curtailed to a few minutes a day.” Amy believed that the outdoor environment contributes greatly to children’s cognitive, physical, social and emotional development. However, the outdoor play environment in her school varied greatly when compared to School A and B. Inadequate space and resources limited children’s opportunities and hindered effective practice and the implementation of her beliefs.

To sum up this theme, the power of the learning environment is portrayed through Malaguzzi’s (1996, p. 40) statement:

... we consider the environment to be an essential constituent element of any theoretical or political research in education ... we place enormous value on the role of the environment as a motivating and animating force in creating spaces for relations, options, and emotional and cognitive situations that produce a sense of well-being and security.

This statement is consistent with the beliefs of all three participants in this study that effective teaching requires a positive indoor and outdoor learning environment that is stimulating and that children must feel secure in their learning environment. Gugu and Nicky were generally consistent with their beliefs and practices as they provided a positive learning environment that enabled effective pedagogy. Amy however, had factors that hindered effective practice such as a large number of learners, insufficient space and inadequate resources.

#### **5.4.2 Theme 2 – Beliefs Relating to Teaching Strategies and Classroom Management**

Miller (2008, p. 963) refers to teaching strategies “as the procedures, processes, activities and tools used to assist in learning.....a wide range of actions... situated across a variety of contexts.” In order for effective teaching to take place a teacher must have good classroom

management skills. Martin & Sugarman (1993, p. 9) referred to classroom management as “those activities of classroom teachers that create a positive classroom climate within which effective teaching and learning can occur.” The social constructivist’s strategy of teaching and learning encourages teaching for understanding using an interactive approach in which learners are actively engaged in meaningful learning experiences. In addition a teachers’ capacity to manage the classroom environment in order to promote children’s social and emotional development is crucial for maintaining quality in Grade R classes. In the following discussion, I use the term ‘teaching strategy’ and ‘classroom management’ to refer to the actions of the teacher and activities experienced by the children in their teaching and learning environments.

#### **5.4.2.1 Strategies to cater for Diversity and Multiculturalism**

When asked about their beliefs and understandings regarding the capabilities of children in Grade R, all three participants in the study believed that Grade R children are capable of more than teachers give them credit for. Nicky elaborated, “*They are pretty much like sponges; they like to learn new things. They are naturally curious.*” From their comments it was ascertained that the teachers in the study believed that children had varied strengths and weaknesses and learnt at different paces. Nicky added a further dimension by saying that children also had different backgrounds and experiences that they brought into the classroom. Their statements highlighted the diversity and multiculturalism that existed in their classrooms. Jalongo et al. (2004, p. 144) and Kostelnik et al. (2004, p. 51) echoed these statements and argued that there are many innate differences among children because of their diverse social, emotional, physical and cultural backgrounds.

When asked whether they believed that teaching was affected by diversities such as language and culture, all three participants believed that it did. Gugu mentioned that some children were immigrants from Congo, Zimbabwe and Somalia whilst other learners in her class were from English, Afrikaans, Xhosa, Venda and IsiZulu speaking backgrounds. She added that since the learners had such diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds it had an impact on her teaching. This finding is consistent with the statement “Today’s classrooms are melting pots of children from diverse backgrounds” (Seefeldt & Wasik, 2006, p. 60). Nicky mentioned, “*There are so many different aspects of a child to consider, race, culture, language and*

*nationalities, learning abilities and socio-economic status.” All three participants believed that catering for diversity was quite challenging and needed effort and sensitivity on the part of the teacher. These comments are similar to the views of Kostelnik et al. (2004, p. 44) as they believed that teachers should to be sensitive to various forms of diversity and use them to plan for children’s learning activities. Teachers’ responses to the question on the different methods they used to cater for diversity included the following: Lessons are planned according to the needs of learners; a variety of concrete resources and teaching aids such as charts and pictures are used; a Zulu speaking assistant is employed to help with translation and assist learners that are in need; and different approaches such as teaching through music, story, movement and rhyme are implemented.*

To cater for diversity Gugu stated *“I look at the needs of the children before I plan. A variety of visual and concrete aids are used to help and guide learners. More guidance and support is given to those learners who are not coping” (May, 6, 2011).*

This was similar to the belief of Amy who mentioned that she improvised with learning materials and activities and adapted it to suit the needs of the learners:

*I have many second language learners in the classroom. Many learners are bussed in as their parents want them to learn in English but they are mostly Zulu speaking. In the past this was very challenging as communication was a huge problem especially as I have such large numbers. I used a variety of charts and concrete materials to teach. However, this year for the first time I have a Zulu speaking helper that was employed after my plea to the principal. She is a huge help in assisting with the language barrier (May, 27, 2011).*

Nicky, however, believed that a multi-faceted strategy was necessary:

*Often when teaching a concept we will do it through a story, we will do it through music and movements, we will try kinaesthetic things, we will do it with physical manipulations using play dough or building blocks to construct. We will use art, drawings or even use white boards to write on. We use charts, pictures and concrete aids because sometimes it is something they may not have seen before. We use many songs and rhymes. We use every kind of medium that we can possibly find for the*

*benefit of the learners as we are aware that not every child learns in the same way (May, 20, 2011).*

When asked to comment on strategies that are in place to address diversity, Nicky commented that they were very fortunate as most of the children in her school spoke English but they have encountered a few learners that could not. Nicky said:

*We use concrete and visual aids together with gestures for learners who come from second language backgrounds. We try and isolate words and gestures so that learners can process what is being said. Like we say 'Hello' and not 'Hello' together with 'How are you,' in the same breath. This can be confusing to the child. We need to speak slowly so that they understand and process what is being said (May, 20, 2011).*

Gugu mentioned:

*If a child speaks Swahili or any other foreign language, as we have many foreign children, I ask the parents to write words like, come here, sit down, good morning, hello and please so that I can learn from them and speak to their children. Sometimes I even get another child in the class who speaks the same language, but understands English better; to help with translation (May, 6, 2011).*

Gugu also stated that they often greeted, sang rhymes, and songs from the different languages and cultures as this was encouraged by her principal to show children that all languages are equally important. She also mentioned that her principal was a persona doll trainer who was currently training them to incorporate the use of persona dolls in the classroom. She added that her principal had explained that the dolls were designed and given a specific persona to raise issues of equality and diversity, such as a particular skin colour or a name of a person or clothing from a different culture.

Amy on the other hand said that she had mostly IsiZulu speaking learners and she had the support of an assistant who spoke fluent IsiZulu. She mentioned that the IsiZulu assistant was of great help in catering for diversity in the classroom, as she translated

where necessary and helped those who were struggling and needed guidance on how to complete tasks.

When asked about strategies needed to cater for multi-cultural differences such as religion and cultural practices, all three participants believed that every effort must be made to ensure that all religions, cultures, languages and ethnic groups are respected. Nutbrown (2006, p. 104) believed that “Respectful educators will ensure that diversity and difference are celebrated and that children are empowered to be themselves as well as learn besides others.” Gugu mentioned that she learnt as much as she could about the children in her class since she had many culturally diverse learners. She commented that they consulted parents on different religious observations and if children do not want to participate in particular events it was respected. Gugu and Nicky added that children are allowed to stay away on their special religious holidays such as, Eid, Diwali and Hanukkah, and the rest of the children are educated about these celebrations as they arise. Gugu stated that some children wear a red string on their hands or a piece of animal skin tied on their hands. They are allowed to do so as parents often explained their reasons for such observances. Nicky believed that catering for cultural diversity can be a bit challenging especially when some children may not eat pork or beef, some children may only eat vegetables, some children can only eat food that was Halaal<sup>22</sup> and some children eat food that was only Kosher.<sup>23</sup> She added that teachers had to be very sensitive and aware of these differences and children must be encouraged to talk about their differences in class discussions. Both Gugu and Nicky believed that children should be given opportunities to talk about their language and traditions so that they feel like a valued part of the class. Winch-Dummett (2006) supports the need for ‘cultural inclusion’ that includes acknowledging culturally specific activities and beliefs, promoting values and an ethos of respect for cultural diversity. In South Africa we live in a constitutional democracy that allows and accommodates religious and other diversities which are consistent with the beliefs of the teachers in this study.

Observation of classroom practice (See section A & D, Appendix E) revealed that all teacher participants displayed a high level of respect for learners of various cultural and ethnic groups as they enjoyed an outstanding rapport with their learners. However, none of the class display

---

<sup>22</sup> Halaal- The term is used to designate food seen as permissible according to Islamic law

<sup>23</sup> Kosher- The term is used to designate food seen as permissible according to Jewish law

areas showed signs of a multi-cultural setting. It was noticed that all three classes only used learning and teaching support materials in the English medium which was the language of learning and teaching (LOLT).<sup>24</sup> None of the classes greeted in different languages in the morning even though each of the three classes had learners from various multi-cultural backgrounds. No materials were visible that deepened awareness and knowledge of diversity and multiculturalism (e.g., dolls of different ethnicities, musical instruments from a variety of cultures, stories that show how one event is interpreted differently by different cultural groups). None of the three teacher participants embraced this diversity to cultivate learning environments that reflect the identities of the children. Literature in early childhood clearly highlight that children differ from one another in their learning dispositions and it is this individuality that should guide teachers as they plan for their learning activities (Jalongo et al., 2004, p. 44; Seefeldt & Wasik, 2006). Although the teachers gave the children opportunities to speak about their homes and cultural practices it did not extend further and was not a regular occurrence. All the teachers believed that the different cultures should be valued and that a classroom must reflect the identities of the learners. However, none of the teachers used any other language, cultural songs or stories in their lessons. No attempts were made to incorporate indigenous knowledge in practice through the use of storytelling using folk tales from different cultures. Songs from different cultures were non-existent in the classroom. Even Amy who was fortunate to have a Zulu speaking helper did not capitalise on this opportunity to incorporate Zulu rhymes and songs in her lessons.

Gugu was proficient in three African languages but did not incorporate this skill through the use of rhymes, songs and code switching in any of her lessons. Nicky's class had learners from various backgrounds but greetings in the different languages or songs from different cultures were lacking. Their teachings approaches appeared to be based on narrow cultural assumptions about what constitutes quality in early childhood. Their lessons failed to acknowledge the children's linguistic and cultural diversity (Woodhead, 2006). However, it must be acknowledged that an attempt has been made in School C to cater for cultural diversity with the employment of a Zulu speaking assistant. However, from the data it was found that the helper was only called in to assist at certain times and not used effectively

---

<sup>24</sup> LOLT-This is the language used for teaching and learning in the school i.e. language of instruction. In terms of the South African Schools Act the Governing Body determines the language policy.

during whole class teaching. These practices were inconsistent with their beliefs of wanting to make the children feel valued and part of the class. Edwards and Kuhlman (2007) argue that some teachers have ‘a heart for diversity instruction’ but lack the knowledge and skills of how to go beyond scratching the surface with learners. In addition, Biersteker (2007, p. 9) found that there have been attempts to incorporate indigenous or contextualized elements in curricula for young children, but not much is known about what this means in practice.

Although Gugu believed that more support should be given to children who are not coping, evidence from the data showed that her actions did not correspond with her belief. She did not use an individual approach to help a child who was struggling with the activity given as he had difficulty understanding the English language and she observed that he was not coping. In her small readiness group activity a learner struggled to fold the paper and make a triangle and even though she was aware of his needs, she did not find the time to help him individually. Amy on the other hand was fortunate to have the support of an IsiZulu speaking helper who translated for certain children and explained how they must complete the activity. The helper walked around explaining to individual learners who needed additional support. Results from the EPPE and REPEY studies showed that teaching and learning was most effective when opportunities are tailored to meet the needs of particular individuals and groups of children, such as those who do not speak English at home (Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2003). In Nicky’s class all the learners were proficient in the English language however; she used repetition, concrete aids and demonstration regularly to help learners who were slower to comprehend. This was consistent with her belief that she uses every medium possible to help a child understand.

#### **5.4.2.2 Beliefs and Practices on Different Types of Teaching Strategies**

During their interviews regarding beliefs on teaching strategies, the need for whole class teaching was articulated by all three participants during early morning ring, story ring and music ring. All the participants stated that they used different approaches at different times depending on what they are teaching. Gugu and Nicky believed that there are some activities which need teacher direction in order for children to learn, especially during small group time, circle time and movement ring. They added that teacher direction is needed when a lot of reasoning and processing is involved to help children develop certain skills. They shared the belief that Grade R children learn most efficiently when they are provided with some



stimulation and guidance. These beliefs are aligned to Vygotsky's theory which maintains that essential to learning is the social interaction between the learner and a knowledgeable adult. Development of the higher cognitive functions depends on situations in which the adult guides the learner's conceptual thinking (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86). Nicky articulated that she read an article which supported this belief:

*I read an article a while ago that said that most young children are naturally gifted but because we limit them and their opportunities and we tell them this is the right way and this is the wrong way instead of guiding and stimulating them, we are not developing them to their full potential (May, 20, 2011).*

All three participants believed that interactive teaching strategies are essential and are used through daily questioning and expecting answers, calling learners out to choose the correct answers like the weather, day of the week, colour and number. They commented that they used numerous rhymes, chants, songs and role play that the children imitated to engage learners as they believed that children learnt through imitation. This belief is consistent with Vygotsky's theory as he asserted that learning is a social process in which "imitation and instruction play a major role" (1962, p. 188).

Gugu stated, "*Children must be involved if they are to learn. They can't just sit and listen*" This was consistent with Nicky beliefs, "*There is no passive learning here. There is constant flow between the children and myself.*" All three participants believed that effective questioning skills are vital. They expressed the belief that through open-ended questions, teachers are constantly directing the children or challenging the children to deepen their thinking, discover new things and solve problems.

All three participants voiced the belief that children learn through different mediums, songs, using songs rhymes, movement, art and drama. Nicky stated that she liked "*using a holistic approach and designs activities that cater for the child social, emotional, physical, creative abilities and not just one medium.*" All three participants stated that they planned activities that cater for the whole child according to rings such as music, dance, movement, drama, developmental play, and story rings. Nicky however, stated that they had created a new ring:

*We have a special language development ring that we have created this year and we are experimenting with it as we have found that even children who come from middle class backgrounds are not stimulated enough and need vocab enrichment as their parents do not have much time to chat and read to them. We feel that is very necessary as language is basically the key to living and learning (May 20, 2011).*

Nicky's beliefs and approach to language draws from aspects of Vygotsky's theory in which language is described as a "powerful psychological tool" that underpins the thinking processes and helps individuals develop both cognitively and socially (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 52-56). The creation of a language ring to enrich children's vocabulary is supported by Vygotsky's belief that one of the most important functions of education is to facilitate the development of rich, effective spoken language (Dolya & Palmer, 2004, p. 3).

When asked about the use of co-operative learning as a teaching strategy both Gugu and Nicky valued small-group learning, as an instructional strategy and articulated that they often use this strategy when teaching school readiness concepts. Nicky stated, "*Sometimes children themselves are the best teachers. You will find children saying don't do it like that or do it like this*" Amy believed that children learn best in groups and she ensures that learners are seated in groups to enable cooperative learning amongst them:

*You find them helping each other with their work especially since I cannot support them all the time because of the large numbers. When they are working or doing a worksheet whilst I am busy, I can hear another child say but count like this and you will get the answer (May, 27, 2011).*

Nicky believed that children are social learners who copy and emulate from others without feeling intimidated or inadequate and should be given opportunities to work and play with each other. Vygotsky (1978) also stressed the importance of social factors in co-operative play, believing that it provides a unique context in which children are motivated to act and at the same time develop their abilities. All three teachers believed that teacher directed and child centred approaches are needed as both are important, and should be integrated into the classroom. Nicky stated that even during teacher directed lessons many opportunities are created for teacher-child interaction such as singing, answering questions, choosing the right card, sequencing and matching.

When asked to comment on beliefs about the use of the chalkboard, Gugu stated that she did not have a chalkboard in her class and if she wanted to show any number or letter formation she used the children's small chalkboards to demonstrate. Nicky also did not have a chalkboard but had a whiteboard which she used together with the children as they used their own little whiteboards:

*At least once a week they get out their whiteboards and they copy what I am doing on my white board. Sometimes it is when I am teaching a structured drawing lesson like drawing a fish. For example I say: Draw an oval in the centre. Now draw a triangle at the end of the oval. The chalkboard or the white board is not something that you rule out totally—you use them in different ways. Since it is their first time that they are learning to write numbers or letters, the whiteboard is not a scary medium, they can simply rub it off if they are not happy with their formation or drawing (May 20, 2011)*

She further mentioned:

*This copying time is essential because they are learning co-ordination, listening skills and building memory. It is done in a very interactive, relaxed and fun way. They look up and back down and back up which is a skill that they need to develop and adjust to. They are not given copious work to copy from the board (May 20, 2011).*

Amy was the exception as she stated that she did use the chalkboard to demonstrate and the children did at times copy work from the chalkboard.

Observation of practice (See section C&D, Appendix E) demonstrated that Nicky used group teaching regularly as learners in her class were familiar with routines. It was also observed that Nicky used many different rings such as movement, drama, development play, story, early morning, music, and creative rings. Nicky incorporated a language ring which was a new school initiative that was geared towards increasing learner vocabulary, knowledge, verbal interaction and language enrichment. Many concrete aids were incorporated in the language ring and numerous open ended and probing questions were used which encouraged learners to communicate. Children were doing activities familiar to them confidently, and for new activities Nicky guided the learners without being prescriptive and telling them what to do. She frequently used open ended questions and invited the learners to imagine, elaborate,

and tell stories. In this way she was able to get more information from the learners and it helped her to get to know the children better. She allowed children to express whatever they were thinking. She did not demand a response, but left space for the children to answer thoughtfully. In this way she encouraged creative thinking, problem solving and imagination. There were some ‘school preparation/readiness’ activities that were done but this was achieved using carefully constructed play-based methods with Nicky’s level and type of support changing over time by moving from directive, to suggestion, to encouragement, to observation as she was a master at carefully scaffolding<sup>25</sup> learning in these sessions. Siraj-Blatchford called this close collaboration “sustained shared thinking” (2009, p. 156). In addition, Nicky took the time to listen to long answers, and in this way she was sending a non-verbal message that she valued their thoughts and ideas. During an observed story ring at the end of the day (See section I, Appendix E) Nicky used a fish puppet to relate a story on making friends. She asked questions like “*How do you make friends?*”, “*What would you do if someone tells an ugly word to you?*”, “*What do you think will happen now?*” She engaged with the learners as they repeated lines, answered questions, gave opinions and sang during the story, thus ensuring that children felt part of the lesson. Nicky was often observed facilitating learning in the classroom by respecting the children’s own knowledge and experiences. This belief and practice is mentioned by Stacey (2009) who argued that the notion of a curriculum whereby children’s previous experiences and their interests are taken into account is based on the theories of Vygotsky. It was visible that Nicky used a socio cultural framework espoused by Vygotsky as she guided the children’s learning in the classroom. Her classroom showed characteristics of a highly collaborative environment. Findings from the EPPE and REPEY studies concluded that a higher incidence of interactions, where adults and children engaged in sustained shared thinking, distinguished the more effective practices (Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2002, 2003). In addition, Sandberg and Eriksson (2008, p. 5) noted that children experience a sense of belonging and high self-esteem when they participate in their learning which was clearly visible in Nicky’s classroom.

Gugu also used group teaching and whole class regularly as children were confident and familiar with routines and transitions and knew exactly what to expect. She incorporated

---

<sup>25</sup> Scaffolding-refers to the educators’ decisions and actions that build on children’s existing knowledge and skills to enhance their learning

songs rhymes and actions in her lessons to focus the children and gain their attention. Opportunities were created for interaction as learners answered questions, completed the weather chart, pointed to the correct answer, and talked about the work their parents did as this was their theme, but the interactions involved very little cognitive challenge. Children's contributions were acknowledged but the teacher demonstrated a lack of awareness of how conversations and learning can be extended as she did not engage with the learners. Movement, music, drama and developmental play activities were planned to develop the learners holistically which demonstrated a link to her belief on catering for the whole child. Concrete aids were used mostly during small group readiness lessons but was lacking during the story ring. Observation of a story lesson showed the teacher reading from a book placed on her lap. The lesson lacked visual stimulation and creativity which was contrary to her belief that children learn most efficiently when they are provided with some stimulation. Gugu made every effort to do her best and draw from the children's experiences and knowledge by providing a mix of adult initiated and child initiated activities. However, scaffolding and mediating children's learning was lacking, especially during free play, story ring and early morning ring. Many teaching and learning opportunities were missed during these observed lessons as the questions posed were mostly closed with little cognitive challenge.

Amy was the only teacher in the study who used whole class teaching throughout the day and the only observation of grouping that was visible was that learners were seated in groups. She often sang songs with little variation but movement and development play activities were planned for on her daily schedule but not done during the week. Opportunities for block play and construction were not available. These observed practices conflicted with her belief on catering for the learners holistically. The questions posed by Amy were mostly closed questions like "*what is the colour of a banana?*" She asked 'known interaction questions' which were known by the teacher and could be answered by one or two word answers. Observation of lessons taught by Amy showed that often opportunities for extending learners thinking were missed during the lessons. For instance Amy took the register during the early morning ring session by calling out all 43 names and waited for a response from the learners while the rest were talking, pulling and touching whereas this could have been used as a counting and memory recollection lesson which was done by Nicky. Nicky (See section J,

Appendix E) chose a child to be the counter who touched each child as she counted. After the counting was completed Nicky asked if anyone was missing from class that morning. The children gave names of their friends who were absent which were written on the white board and when completed they counted how many were absent. During early morning ring the children were mostly involved in choral reading and read all the charts on the wall as the teacher pointed to them. They merely appeared to be chanting with little meaning or learning taking place. Discussion of the weather and calendar which was done by Gugu and Nicky during early morning ring was omitted by Amy as the focus was more on relating daily news and revising all the charts on the wall. Observation of a story ring by Amy demonstrated her usage of colourful story aids but not enough opportunities were created for children to actively participate as the story of the “Gingerbread Man” lends itself to so much more interaction than was observed in the class.

#### **5.4.2.3 Beliefs and Practices on the use of Play, Discovery and Problem Solving**

When asked about their beliefs on how Grade R children learn best, all three teachers believed that children learnt best through play and active involvement with Nicky emphasising that they *“learn through fun activities and via a lot of well-constructed play.”* According to Nicky *“Grade R children do not respond as well as they could in a very a formal environment in fact they will just disseminate and regurgitate what you taught them without fully understanding and internalising concepts as children like to explore to understand new things in order to master them.”* Hirsh-Pasek, Golinkoff, Berk & Singer (2009) describe this type of teaching as “playful learning” and Hayes (2003, p. 79) proposes, play is a pedagogical tool for the teacher as well as a pathway for learning for the child which is consistent with statements by Nicky. Vygotsky (1978, p. 129) mentioned, “in play, a child is always above his average age, above his daily behaviour; in play, it is as though he were a head taller than himself.” He saw play as a means by which a child’s conceptual abilities and imagination are developed.

All three participants believed that learning should be holistic and interactive and children should be given many opportunities to play, explore and discover in order to learn. Nicky mentioned *“Play just comes naturally to children. In this way children explore and learn about things around them. They learn to socialise with others and they also learn from each*

*other when they are playing together.*” Vygotsky (1978, p. 101) suggested, that play is much more as it fosters an internal transformation in children. Nicky said “*by incorporating interactive play or ‘hands-on’ learning, children will make a connection to their lives and learning will be more meaningful.*” Amy mentioned “*Children must smell, taste, hear, touch or see the abstract concept you want to convey when they play.*” They believed that there was a need to create a learning environment that is full of sensory experiences. Kostelnik et al. (2004, p. 74) also emphasised the need for children to have hands on sensorial stimulation; as “all learning begins with perception; seeing, hearing, touching, tasting and smelling.” Nicky valued the use of play-based teaching stating that play was children’s work and by playing with different types of blocks, beads, toys, clay, sand, puzzles and other natural materials, children learn to differentiate between different shapes, size, colour and texture, which was vital in developing reading and learning number concepts. Elkind (1993) disagreed with the notion that play was work as he commented, “Play is not the child’s work, and work is hardly child’s play” (p. 29), adding that early childhood teachers should “resist the pressures to transform play into work or academic instruction” (Elkind, 2003, p. 50).

Gugu expressed similar beliefs as Nicky about teaching Numeracy concepts using manipulatives, such as beads, blocks, buttons which were concrete items to teach abstract concepts. These beliefs are supported by Foote et al. (2004, p. 14) who note that children learn by connecting their concrete experiences to their thinking. Gugu, however, added that she used a play approach because her principal insists that it should be done that way, although she does not like too much of “*play ,play all the time. There should be a time for play and a time for work.*” She believed that play is important for learning but not too much of it. She added that preferred a formal method of teaching during school readiness as she believed it was more structured and productive, whereas play was important during free play and outdoor play. Similarly, Pramling-Samuelsson & Asplund-Carlsson (2008, p. 623) found that in the context of early childhood education, play and learning are often separated in time as well as in space. Circle time and literacy hours are seen as practices of teaching and instruction, while play is put aside until free time or outdoors.

Amy mentioned that although she believed that teaching through play is the ideal method, it was not really implemented by her because there were so many skills and outcomes to be

achieved in the curriculum before the children go to Grade 1. Izumi-Taylor, Pramling-Samuelsson & Rogers (2010) found that to meet high standards for knowledge and skills, the curriculum may be focused only on content rather than on the developmental learning needs of children, which often results in elimination of play or physical education in favour of more formal or academic activities. Amy articulated that she used a formal approach to teaching as she had to be in control especially since she had a large class. She added that she had few resources and sometimes when children played they fought over things and broke it, so it was much easier to have the play items packed away. She mentioned that parents expect their children to come to school and work. She added when parents come in for parent meetings they want to see evidence of what their child can do, so play was reserved for mainly when they went outside for free play. Similarly Olsen & Sumison (2000) found that a teacher in their research study on the use of dramatic play in classrooms cited parental expectations as a reason for not incorporating dramatic play in her practice. The teacher in their study perceived that parents wanted something to view on paper at the end of each day. Amy added that she often used play as a reward if the children performed well in Numeracy and Literacy.

Nicky was the exception who articulated that she used well-constructed play activities regularly as she believed that it motivated the children, made learning fun and developed children's social, cognitive, emotional and physical abilities. She added that through play children learnt self-control and social skills. Nicky's statement was consistent with the findings of Honig (2006, p. 16-21) who stated that play enhances bodily gracefulness, promotes social skills, sharpens cognitive and language skills, teaches gender roles, develops understanding of number and time concepts, promotes spatial understanding, prompts causality reasoning, clarifies the world of pretend versus real, enriches sensory and aesthetic appreciation, extends attention span, persistence, and sense of mastery, allows children to express emotions and deepens a child's sense of serenity and joy. Nicky added:

*When a child is playing and discovering, there is a lot going on in their minds. The child is making connections and figuring out things. A good example is when we were learning the letter R. I told them we are going to make a rocket. I don't tell them how to do it. I just put toilet roll, paper, scissors etc. I did not give them any instruction except try and build a rocket. I just observed and asked questions as they went ahead*



*and made their own rockets and figured it out themselves. That's what all of our teaching is based, on trying to develop creative thinkers who are going to be problem solvers. If you simply give very set ideas that are very prescriptive and not allow them to play and explore, they are only going to give back what you throw at them. What we need to do is to be able to receive and be willing to take the time to watch and listen (May 20, 2011).*

Nicky's belief that children must be given opportunities to play and discover in order to become creative thinkers instead of being told what to do, echoed the beliefs Johansson & Pramling-Samuelsson (2006, 2007), where it was shown that some teachers in their study became more preoccupied with getting children to arrive at correct answers that this preoccupation excluded all kinds of playfulness in the learning process. By focusing on only correct answers, teachers discouraged play in the classroom and diminished creativity which the authors believed is needed to develop children to become creative thinkers.

Data from the observation schedules revealed that in both Nicky and Gugu's classes some of the day was spent in direct teaching of the whole group, a part of the day was spent working in small groups with the teachers working on a specific task and some of the day was spent with the children involved in free play. Free play refers to child initiated play and involves the child choosing his/her own activity and resources while staff observe, extend or provide further resources when necessary to further enhance the child's learning. Smidt (2007, pp. 8-9) distinguishes the value of play for children as "what makes play different is that it is something that the child has chosen to do...to follow his interest...it carries no risk of failure" which was evident in this study. Children in both these classes were provided with a variety of activities in different zones which were prepared by the teachers in advance. The variety of choices provided catered for different learners needs as both Nicky and Gugu provided many opportunities for block play, construction, painting, drawing, cutting, sticking, movement, dramatic play, singing and outdoor activities which were consistent with their beliefs. Rosenholtz and Simpson (in Katz, 1995, p.114) maintain that, "A pedagogical approach is appropriate if it adopts a variety of methods to teaching that avails a wide variety and range of activities to children" which was consistent with the practices of Gugu and Nicky. Children in both Nicky and Gugu's classes engaged in various kinds of play, such as physical play, object

play, pretend or dramatic play, constructive play, and games with rules. Wood (2004, p. 21) advocated that through play children demonstrated improved verbal communication, high levels of social and interaction skills, creative use of play materials, imaginative and divergent thinking skills and problem-solving capacities. These were clearly visible in Nicky's and Gugu's class.

Vygotsky's theory was also visible in both Nicky and Gugu's class as I watched learners interact in the dramatic play areas, pretending to be mummies, doctors, nurses, superman, and fairies. Vygotsky's theory demonstrated that fantasy play is essential for cognition because it is through their imaginations that children start to understand and use symbols like language and objects in their play (Vygotsky, 1978; Bodrova & Leong, 2003). According to Vygotsky (1978, p. 94), emerging dramatic play is not symbolic from the start, but it allows the child to realise tendencies and desires that cannot be achieved in any other way. Learning through dramatic play was clearly visible in both these classes. However, it is important to note that even though Gugu provided numerous play opportunities to engage her learners her practice does not match her belief as she did not believe in "*Too much play, play*" She did however, incorporate it as this was the ethos and belief of the school principal and she had to conform. Since she did not believe in using a play approach when teaching, her play-based lessons lacked skill in implementation as opportunities to scaffold children's learning and to direct their thinking were often missed. In keeping with Vygotsky's socio-cultural approach to learning, educators need to provide appropriate scaffolding and support as children are challenged to co-construct new knowledge, skills and understandings. For this to be realised, Siraj-Blatchford and Sylva (2004) argue that educators need to adopt a much more proactive than a reactive role. This study reflects reports by other researchers that play is not always characterised by high-quality adult-child interactions or cognitive challenge (Meadows & Cashdan, 1988, Bennet & Kell, 1989, Moyles et al., 2002). Observing Gugu during free play highlighted that most of the time was spent observing learners and being alert to incidents that may be potentially dangerous but limited verbal interactions occurred during these sessions which was consistent with Liddell's observation (in Prochner & Kabiru, 2008, p. 196), that teachers used less language with children during play.

Data from the observation schedule revealed that in Amy's class, child initiated, problem solving and play-based learning was limited. There was little evidence of stimulating learning experiences that engaged learners actively. The main strategy used by Amy was explaining and asking closed questions that required one or two word answers requiring no cognitive challenge. Most of the practice observed focused on managing children rather than developing their learning. The use of concrete materials were limited which reflected an inconsistency with her beliefs that learning should be 'hands on' and that children must touch, hear, feel and taste in order to learn. In practice the development of the learner holistically using music, art, drama, and physical education did not warrant the same level of importance as the teaching of Numeracy and Literacy which was in total contrast to her stated beliefs. Amy believed that small group teaching was important especially for school readiness lessons but in practice these lessons were observed being taught as a whole class method with little engagement and lacking sufficient concrete materials and relevance to the real life experiences of the learners. In essence "the children are being kept busy rather than being afforded rich learning opportunities" (WSoE, 2009, p. 166). For Amy, the observed teaching strategies used were not consistent with her beliefs. In particular, this was evident in the formal approach used for teaching in the classroom, with children using workbooks and numerous worksheets. This finding reflects observations by other scholars and researchers about the increasing trend to emphasise academics in early teaching in many parts of the world (Maccoby & Lewis, 2001, p. 161; Parker & Neuharth, 2006, Goldstein, 2007, p. 396; WSoE, 2009). Analyses of documents reveal that although free play was planned, it was not actually implemented and was reduced to mere play time during lunch activities or reward time. There was little flexibility with regard to the use of time and experiences were related to specific content and skills. Amy's beliefs were inconsistent with her practice as she believed that learning through play was important but failed to implement this in her class, citing parental pressure, lack of resources, space and large numbers as factors that hinder practice.

#### **5.4.2.4 Teaching Strategies or Practices during School Readiness**

To elaborate on the different instructional strategies used by the teacher participants in the study a detailed account of three school readiness lessons observed is discussed. This data generated from observations of classroom practices is privileged in this study because school

readiness lessons are focused towards developing specific pre-literacy and pre-numeracy skills that are essential to cope with the transition to Grade 1.

Gugu began her small group readiness by calling all the learners to the carpet. She proceeded with a singing activity which the children were familiar with to settle them down. All the words used in the boxes below are the actual words of the teacher and learners.

#### Vignette 1

Children and teacher recite the following poem with actions:

Open, shut them, open, shut them.  
*(Children open and shut hands.)*

Give a little clap. *(children clap hands.)*

Open, shut them, open, shut them *(children open and shut hands)*

Put them on your head *(children put hands on head.)*

Put them on your shoulders *(children put hands on shoulders.)*

Put them behind your back *(Children put hands behind back.)*

Put them on your lap *(Children put hands on lap.)*

Gugu then proceeded with the lesson by asking the learners to fold their arms and listen carefully.

#### Vignette 2

**T**<sup>26</sup> - For school readiness today the circles group will make a triangle. They will make a triangle. They will fold the paper like this *(Teacher folds diagonally)* and they will cut on the line to make a triangle. She holds up a triangle and asks why it is a triangle.

**C1**<sup>27</sup>—It has three sides.

**T**-Okay lets count the sides.

**CLASS**- 1,2,3

**T**: It's got three sides. Anything else you can tell me

**C2**- It has 4 corners

<sup>26</sup> T – Is used here as an abbreviation for teacher.

<sup>27</sup> C is used as an abbreviation for a response of a child. Numbers are placed next to the letter C to show different children's responses.

**T**-Does it have 4 corners?

**Class** –No

**T**- Okay lets count the corners

**T and CLASS** : 1,2,3

**T** – It has 3 corners. Now all the children in circles group will fold the red paper on their desks to make a triangle and cut on the line and when they finish they will stick it on the white paper. You must paint around the triangle. Remember you have to paint around the triangle and you must feel the straight lines.

**T**– The other group, the triangles group will draw a picture of what work their parents do. Like if they use computer you must draw them at a computer. If your mother is a nurse, you draw, if your mother is a doctor you draw. You must draw what your own parents do. Do not copy from other students. You will draw what work your parents do. You will draw with your khoki pens and colour in with your crayons.

**T** – (*Holds up cut of rectangle*) What shape is this?

**Class**- Rectangle

**T** -Why is it a rectangle?

**C4**- It has 4 corners.

**T** –lets count the corners

**Class**- 1,2, 3, 4

**T** –and what else.

**C5**- It has different sides

**T** – Yes because 2 sides are short and other 2 sides are long. And what else

**C6** –It has 4 sides

**T** -It has 4 sides and 4 corners. So now you have to fold it and fold it and make more small rectangles in this big one. The rectangle becomes smaller and smaller. When you finished you draw over the lines and you use different khokis so you can see how many you made.

**T** –Circles go to your place and put your aprons on. Fold the paper first and you can start.

**T** - Squares go to your table and start folding your rectangles. Remember you have to fold first

**T** –Triangles go to your table. You must draw what work your parents do.

**T** –Rectangles go to your place. You must you do pattern cards and make the same colour pattern on the cards with the beads.

All learners proceeded to their places and began their specific activities as all the resources were already placed on their tables. Gugu walked around and helped all the groups. She stopped at the different tables and at times assisted some learners. She did not spend time teaching an individual group. All the learners were actively involved and appeared to be

comfortable with working on their own which was a clear indication that this method of teaching was a regular occurrence. Gugu praised the children and encouraged them as they proceeded with their tasks stopping at the different groups to observe. However, opportunities to scaffold children's learning and to direct their thinking were often missed as she did not spend enough time with any particular group. One particular learner was observed having difficulty folding a triangle but no individual attention was given to the learner.

Nicky was a lot more creative in the presentation of her school readiness lesson as she incorporated play in her lesson (See section H, Appendix E). The lesson began with revision of 'shapes' including both 2D and 3D shapes. In a bag Nicky put some 2D and 3D shapes and asked children to sit in a circle. They sang a song '*What is in the bag? What is in the bag? Eya, eya, ey*' while passing the bag to their next friend. When the teacher told them to stop, the child who had the bag put his/her hand in the bag, and felt a shape and described it. The rest of the children tried to guess the described shape. The shape was then removed, identified and described in detail. They continued with activity until all the shapes in the bag were revealed. She then proceeded to take all the learners outside into the school hall and made all the children stand in a circle.

### Vignette 3

*The teacher made the children form a circle and then stand with their hands at their sides.*

**T** -We have been learning about shapes. What shape is this that we are standing in?

**CLASS**- Circle

**T**- We are standing in a circle with our hands at our sides. What can you see?

**C1**- there is lots of open spaces.

**T** -Yes there are spaces between us. Now when we join hands what happens to the circle?

**C2** - We close the circle.

**T**- Yes we close the circle. Okay let's hold hands and close the circle. Now let go of your hands. What happens? See the open spaces. (*The children open and close hands to understand open and closed lines.*)

**T**- Now we are going to play a game. I want to choose a fish and a shark. Let me choose someone who has been standing and listening beautifully. OH this is so difficult because you are all sitting so nicely. Jaden you can be the shark and Lebo you are the fish. Now the rest of us, we are going to be like the sea. We need to let the fish in and out by opening or closing the circle. We have to protect the fish because the shark wants to eat the fish. If the fish comes by you, you open quickly and let it swim in or out because we don't want the shark to catch the fish.

**CLASS**- *The children all played the game and had lots of fun.*

Then the teacher asked the children to sit while she scattered different shapes all over the floor, enough for each learner. She played musical shapes as she tapped the tambourine fast/slow, the children had to walk around the shapes at the same pace as the beat. When she said ‘stop’ they had to find a shape, pick it up and sit down. Each child had to identify the shape they had found and hand it to the teacher. They then got in line ready to go to the class for small group readiness tasks to be completed by them. When all the learners got to the class they sat on the carpet as Nicky explained what each group will do.

#### Vignette 4

##### **Ladybirds**

**T-** Each one of you has a bag with numbers inside. You have play dough and different shape cutters to cut out with. You have to cut shapes to match the numbers in the bag. *(Teacher opens one bag and shows number 2 –asks).* How many shapes must I cut?

**C1-** two.

**T-** Show me two fingers.  
*(Children show her 2 on fingers)*

**T-** All of you must get out your white boards and use the green side at the back to roll your play dough. *(She shows the learners how to place the numbers against the board and layout the work.)* When you have finished you can get out your white board markers and trace over the dots on this laminated number cards to learn and practice your numbers.

##### **Bees**

**T-** You have matchsticks and pattern cards. I don’t need to explain. You know what to do. Please make sure I don’t see any matchsticks on the floor because we must make sure they are all there when we want to use it again.

##### **Dragonflies**

**T-** Remember how we sorted toys like pizza slices, car tyres, clocks, into different shape boxes. Each of you has a big worksheet that is divided into three parts. Squares, circles, triangles. Stick this in your books. You also have this small sheet with pictures of a window, wheel, slice of pizza and you have to decide whether they are squares or circles or triangles. You need to cut them out from the small sheet and paste them in the correct place in the big sheet.

##### **Butterflies**

You have to stick this sheet and wait for me. *(The teacher walked around to ensure the other groups were settled. Then she returned)*

She recapped opened and closed lines. She then asked the learners to close the curved line so that the mouse is inside the shape *(she watched and directed where needed as they proceeded).* Then she asked the learners to close the angular line in the next picture so that the mouse is outside the shape.

*Next she asked learners to put their hands on their heads, put their hands under the desk, pick up their right hand, wave their left hand and put their left hand below their chins.*

*She then gave the learners four mice cut outs which they had to stick in the correct places as she read out the instructions.*

Put the mouse inside the circle

Stick the mouse below the triangle.

Put the mouse on the left hand side of the rectangle.

Put the mouse under the square

*(She observed as they placed the mouse in each of the places and guided, cautioned when necessary as*

*motivated and encouraged them along. This group received her focused attention).*

Observations of Nicky's lessons revealed that Nicky grasped the implications of the constructivist approach and her role as a facilitator of learning as children were given opportunities to play and understand concepts using real life experiences such as the game of the shark and fish to teach open and closed lines. The use of play ensured that the concept being taught was of relevance to the children and hence meaningfully understood. According to Kohn (2000, p. 145)

To take children seriously is to value them for who they are right now rather than seeing them as adults-in-the-making. Thus, what we ask them to do should have "horizontal relevance,"...It ought to be "meaningful to them at the time" — for example, related to something that could happen on the way home from school. Mere "vertical relevance" isn't enough: there's a reason to be concerned if the only justification for learning something is that students will need to know it later — for example, as part of the following year's curriculum.

Nicky's use of the musical shapes game and the fish and shark game ensured that play and learning were not separated but were instead integrated to enable meaningful learning. The use of play enriched the children's understanding and with this understanding, the meanings of abstract concepts were developed in a meaningful context. The assertion that "play contains all developmental tendencies in a condensed form and is itself a major source of development" (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 102) was visible in this classroom. After Nicky explained what each group had to do, she had a focussed group session with the Butterflies group. Constant dialogue and shared interaction was observed in the focussed group session. Children were free to ask questions, clarify instructions and demonstrate their understanding as learning in this group involved the development of basic skills, procedural knowledge and conceptual knowledge such as "above, below and on top". In the EPPE study effective settings were characterised by cognitive interactions between adult and child (Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2002). However, it was noticed that, although Nicky believed that learning should be informal, her learners had to complete formal tasks, such as worksheets. On a positive note it was noticed that the use of worksheets did not involve much writing, merely drawing, cutting and sticking under the guidance of the teacher and the children were very capable. As



Nicky worked with the Butterflies, she kept an eye on the other groups and sometimes went up to them to comment or encourage. All groups eventually got to have a focused session with her as she rotated the same activities for the week. When learners completed their tasks they were free to choose activities from the different learning centres arranged in the classroom. The school readiness sessions were well planned and clearly thought out with a balance of child centered and teacher directed experiences. This observation is consistent with the findings of the REPEY study which found that effective teaching in the early years involved a balance between a teacher directed, programmed learning approach, and an open framework approach where children are provided with ‘free’ access to a range of instructive learning environments in which adults support children’s learning (Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2002).

Amy believed that small group teaching was important however, she taught her school readiness lesson with the entire class. The children were all seated at their desks as she presented the lesson. Not all the children were focussed or listening while she explained. The concept she introduced was “long, longer longest” and “tall and short”. The only concrete aids used were three different sized paint brushes that she held up for learners to see. She explained the different lengths and called out learners to choose the longest paint brush. She then proceeded to explain how to do the worksheet that she placed on the chalkboard. She asked learners to look at the three pencils and point out the longest pencil. A learner was called to the front to point to the longest pencil. She then asked learners to look at the two trees below and find the tree that is short. A learner was called to the front to point out the short tree. The main strategy used by Amy was explaining and asking closed questions that required one or two word answers. With the introduction of the lesson complete, a compiled workbook with photocopied worksheets belonging to each learner was passed out to the class. Learners were asked to open to the same page as the one displayed on the chalkboard. They were then asked to colour the longest pencil and the short tree.

The activity failed to provide an investigative or exploratory model that is advocated for effective pedagogy and the opportunity to develop the children's understanding using more practical activities was missed. Amy’s practice did not match her reported beliefs mentioned in her interview that children need to touch, taste, and smell in order to understand an abstract concept. Some children didn’t understand the instruction and were

colouring all the pencils and both the trees so the teacher called in the IsiZulu support helper to explain the concept again. For some children this task was very simple and was completed quickly as it involved limited cognitive challenge. The teacher asked those children to proceed to the next page in the workbook and colour in the pictures and write the numbers, even though this worksheet was not explained. Amy was teaching without much interaction and stimulation, instead most of the practice observed focused on her managing children rather than developing their learning. Siraj-Blatchford et al. (2003) found out that in some Reception classes' most learning episodes were initiated by adults and the highest proportion of the activities was direct teaching. The findings in this class suggested the same. It can be stated that in this school, 'shared thinking' that increased sustained learning was rare. Children were responding to teachers' queries in a non-verbal or verbal way as well as answering closed questions, 'finding' or/and 'showing' what the teacher wanted were common pedagogy. According to Ball (2000, pp. 241-247) teachers must know not only the content they teach, but also how students' knowledge is developed and structured; how to manage internal and external representations of concepts; how to make students' understanding of mathematics visible; and how to diagnose student misunderstandings and misconceptions, correct them, and guide them in reconstructing conceptual knowledge of mathematics which was clearly lacking in Amy's practice.

After observing all three teachers it was clearly evident that Nicky and Gugu catered for learners holistically, offering sensory stimulation and active engagement with concrete objects, whereas Amy was more formal in her approach and merely explained the concept and followed with the completion of a worksheet. Nicky was the only teacher that offered play opportunities in her readiness lessons and did not separate play from learning. Play was integrated into her lesson to ensure that children understood open and closed lines in a real context. Both Amy and Nicky used formal worksheets in school readiness activities but Nicky only used worksheets after introducing the concepts through various interactive and concrete experiences and was confident that learners were capable of doing this formal task. However, Amy showed no evidence of using a variety of stimulating learning experiences before the worksheet was introduced which resulted in many learners misunderstanding how to complete the worksheet. In Amy's class there was evidence of her making decisions and telling the children what to do without giving the children a voice or allowing them to participate actively.

#### **5.4.2.5 Beliefs and Practices on Classroom Management Strategies**

When asked to comment on their beliefs on classroom management strategies all three teachers commented that their management styles vary from democratic to autocratic depending on a situation or tasks being done. Nicky stated:

*I often give my children opportunities to give their opinions and make decisions. But sometimes they need be told in a no nonsense way how they should do something or how they need to behave and sometimes you allow a bit of lee way. As the teacher, I need to ensure that I have good control and sort of lead without being forceful but rather gently coercing and directing in a positive way (May 20, 2011)*

Gugu mentioned: *Sometimes I have to be autocratic and tell them what to do. Sometimes I am democratic and negotiate with them: shall we go outside or do we want to play inside. But often I have to take the lead and show that I am in control (May, 6, 2011)*

Amy, however, mentioned that she is very tolerant:

*I don't expect everything be perfect but there has to be some order in the classroom and the child must know his place in the class and know that the teacher is in charge and that they have to listen. I have a very big class and I cannot give them too much freedom as they will take advantage of me. I do ask for their opinions and give them a say in activities but I am very much in control and that's the only way to keep order (May, 27, 2011).*

All three participants believed that classrooms needed rules to function effectively, and they are a necessity for effective teaching and learning. Marzano, R, Marzano J, & Pickering (2003) note that a well-managed classroom provides an environment in which teaching and learning can flourish. All three teachers articulated that through the establishment of rules children get to know their limits and boundaries and they increase a child's security. All the teachers in the study believed that through rules children learn how to behave with others and respect their rights. In addition Harry & Rosemary Wong (2009, p. 7) found "Effective classroom routines are the rules and procedures that teachers consistently use on a daily basis in their classrooms." Each of the research participants had varied strategies on how rules were created, explained and enforced. Gugu stated:

*I have a rules chart which is discussed in the first term. Learners are told about the importance of having rules and why they are needed. They are told that it is meant to keep them safe and to help them learn. Often I refer to it when a learner has broken a rule. If a child repeatedly breaks a rule then I place the child in the time out chair to think about their actions (May, 6, 2011).*

Nicky's response was

*We have a two week orientation at the beginning of the year where we talk to the children about our expectations and the need for rules and together we build a chart with our classroom rules. We take them to the different areas and we discuss the rules and sometimes we show them what is expected of them in these areas or we ask learners to demonstrate what is expected. We do a little bit each day so that they are not overwhelmed and by the end of the two weeks they have been orientated about the rules of the classroom and school. Thereafter throughout the year this is reinforced and revisited when the need arises. When children break the rules, then their names go in the sad face corner and if they change their actions their names are removed from the sad face corner. This really works because they don't like to see their names in the sad face corner (May 20, 2011).*

Nicky's process of building rules together with learners is consistent with the views of Porteus, Vally, & Ruth (2001, p. 59) who refer to classroom management as a democratic process in which rules are made with special emphasis on the importance of participation and involvement in the thinking and decision-making processes within a classroom.

Amy stated:

*I do have rules chart but I don't put it up because there is limited space. But it is very important and I do a lot of discussion in the first term on the rules e.g. Stand in line, wait your turn, do not take things that do not belong to you etc. It teaches them manners and social skills which is very important. When children constantly break the rules I send them to the HoD or the deputy principal. However, if learners are continually misbehaving even after all this, then I take their privileges away or I make them stand in a corner when its home time and some of them panic because now everyone is going home and they are left behind. But they got to know that I mean*

*business because if you just allow them to do as they please then you not going to have an effective classroom (May , 27, 2011).*

All three participants believed that positive reinforcement was the best method to encourage and establish discipline. They acknowledged that the constant use of praise, clapping of hands, stars and happy faces boosts self-esteem and motivated children to work and behave better. Nicky stated:

*We have class motivation or group motivation—Marbles in jar, star charts etc. We also have individual motivational awards every week where certificates are awarded in assembly. These rewards spur on the willingness to want to constantly try harder. I just don't give awards to academic or work performance, it for being kind, packing away things etc. Children love to be recognised. They love to be praised and for their behaviour to be affirmed. There is this fine line between praise and encouragement. Certain things do deserve praise but most the things need on-going encouragement which I do via positive reinforcement (May 20, 2011).*

According to Patterson (1975), the need for a positive learning environment is based on the social learning theory. Patterson (1975) maintained that children thrive when adults take an interest in what they do, praise good and pro-social behaviour, encourage participation, allow choices, and are aware of their developmental needs and emotional reactions to stress which are consistent with the beliefs of all three participants who believe in the use of positive reinforcement. Amy was only teacher who commented that she also used outdoor play as an incentive for good behaviour.

Nicky believed that if there is a deviance in behaviour it should be seen as a teaching opportunity, explaining why the behaviour was unacceptable. She mentioned that she often dramatised appropriate and inappropriate behaviour for children to learn. She believed that many children come from different home backgrounds where they think something is appropriate because they observe it happening at home. She added they do not know any better and cannot be punished and should be taught about why it was unacceptable. The findings of Evertson and Weinstein (2006, p. 4), maintain that classroom management has two distinct purposes: “It not only seeks to establish and sustain an orderly environment so

students can engage in meaningful learning, it also aims to enhance student social and moral growth”. Gugu and Amy held similar beliefs. Siraj-Blatchford et al. (2002) in the REPEY study maintain that social skills are promoted by working through conflicts as effective early childhood settings support children in being assertive, at the same time as helping them rationalise and talk through their conflicts. They maintained that children have better social/behavioural developmental outcomes in settings where staff consistently helps them talk through conflicts, and pro-actively support the children in developing their social skills (e.g. through story books and group discussions to work through common conflicts). These findings concur with the beliefs of the teachers in this study. In the data it was found that:

Amy stated: *“I try to make lessons out of certain types of behaviour—if someone was taking other people things without permission, then I base a life skills lesson on that topic”*

Gugu commented: *“I often problem solve with them and explain why their behaviour is inappropriate and this helps guide their future behaviour.”*

Nicky said: *“Children often need guidance about how to play appropriately and some can be more assertive than others. I often read them stories, do lots of role playing and puppetry to model appropriate behaviour and discourage inappropriate behaviour.”*

Observation of practice (See section C, Appendix E) demonstrated that Both Nicky and Gugu’s class had regular routines and patterns that the children were familiar with, they were generally well behaved and positive learner and teacher relationships were observed. Both teachers were very soft spoken and therefore seemed to have a calmer, quieter classroom than Amy who had a much stronger voice and the children were often loud and rowdy. Gugu and Nicky used transition songs to calm the children and to get them to focus before proceeding with their lesson whereas Amy failed to get the attention of everyone in her class before she started teaching as a result she was teaching above the chatter of some learners who were not listening. Both Nicky and Gugu came to class well prepared with lessons for the day making sure that they have all materials and were ready to go which actually served to reduce ‘downtime’ and helped maintain discipline in their classroom. Some of Amy’s lessons were very short, lacked depth and stimulation, resulting in learners chatting and not listening while she was teaching. As a result there was a lot more behaviour management and reprimands on her part. The use of positive reinforcement was observed in Nicky’s class when a learner displayed exemplary behaviour. Nicky praised the learner and put his name in the happy face

corner. This action was observed by other learners, who then almost automatically tried to model this behaviour. Gugu's beliefs matched her practice as she gently coerced learners, modelled appropriate behaviour, and praised and acknowledged learners contributions. Nicky and Gugu were always proactive and very consistent in their classroom management techniques. Nicky's story lesson using the fish puppet was aimed at teaching learners good friendships skills and examples of inappropriate behaviour were woven into the interactive story which matched her reported belief of using stories to model appropriate and inappropriate behaviour. Both Gugu and Nicky valued the importance of rules which was reflected in practice through a display of rules charts with pictures. Children were consistently redirected to the classroom rules in a positive manner when the need arose. Amy believed rules to be important but in practice, a rules chart did not exist, so the classroom rules did not appear to be consistent as there was no visual reference. Both Gugu and Nicky were observed using stars, happy faces and positive comments. Amy used the reward of play as a means of encouraging discipline. Amy, however, was often reactive as she was heard telling learners that they will stay in after school if they do not keep quiet and get on with their work. Classroom management practices that involve a high degree of emotional or physical threat, ultimatums and inconsistency hurt the development of trust, security and respect (Vitto, 2003, p. 11).

In summary all three participants used a variety of teaching strategies and classroom management skills. The findings in this study are consistent with the results of the Qualitative Study on Early Childhood Educator's beliefs about key classroom experiences by Lara-Cinisamo et al. (2009) that there are differences in educator's beliefs about appropriate approaches to guiding the education of young children. The teachers believed that children in Grade R. are unique, diverse and capable learners who are eager to do, know and think. They mentioned that meeting these children's physical social, emotional and educational needs will allow them to attain their potential and with the right stimulation, guidance and appropriately chosen mediums to suit the diverse needs of learners, they will soar. Nicky's practices almost always matched her beliefs. She managed to create a reciprocal learning environment through shared meaning and a collaborative positive learning environment that catered for a child's social and cognitive development. This study echoed that "The settings that viewed cognitive and social development [including learning dispositions] as complementary seemed to

achieve the best outcomes” (Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2003, p. vii). Gugu’s practices sometimes matched her beliefs. However, Gugu also changed her practices to suit the beliefs of her principal. Amy’s beliefs very rarely linked to practice as she often cited factors such as large classes as a constraint. A major finding in this research study was that the class size seemed to affect the approach used by Amy as both Gugu and Nicky who had smaller classes used more child-centred approaches whereas Amy who had 43 learners preferred a teacher dominated approach. Jambunathan and Caulfield (2006, p. 256) also found that class size determines the approach used by the teacher to plan children’s learning, and Foote et al. (2004, p. 142) noted that class sizes affected the duration of interactions between children and their teachers as teachers with fewer children tend to use child-centred approaches, while those with larger classes preferred question and answer approaches.

#### **5.4.3 Theme 3 - Planning, Curriculum and Professional Development**

Planning entails deciding ahead of time what activities and resources will be used in the session, to best suit the needs of the class and of the individuals within it, and to ensure that effective learning takes place. In order for teachers to plan a curriculum guideline is necessary. Wojtczak (2002) defines curriculum as an educational plan that spells out which goals and objectives should be achieved, which topics should be covered and which methods are to be used for learning, teaching and evaluation. With the constant changing and revising of the curriculum teachers need on-going professional development. Professional development, in a broad sense refers to the development of a person in his or her professional role. Professional development includes formal experiences (such as attending workshops, professional meetings , mentoring and studying further), and informal experiences (such as reading professional documents, surfing the internet for lesson plans and watching television documentaries and films pertaining to the teaching profession) (Villegas-Reimers, 2003, p.11). The beliefs and practices of all three research participants regarding planning, the curriculum used and the professional support received or pursued is reported in this section to yield insights into how pedagogy is framed in these Grade R classes.



#### **5.4.3.1 Beliefs and Practices relating to Planning and Curriculum**

When asked to comment on their beliefs relating to the importance of planning all three teachers believed that planning according to a year plan, term plan and a weekly plan was important as it gave them direction and helped them to achieve their outcomes. They valued the need to plan according to a Grade R schedule to cater for the child holistically. All the teachers in the study shared the belief that planning must reflect the child's interests and that there was a need to treat each child as an individual in the learning process which concurs with findings of Lee (2006) who found that teachers in their study fully endorsed the belief that lesson planning must draw from the children's interests. The teachers believed that lessons are planned to help them achieve certain outcomes that most children are expected to achieve by the time they leave the Grade R class. Kostelnik et al. (2004, P. 67) suggested that the act of planning involves purpose, organisation, foresight, preparation and deliberate decision making. Gugu and Nicky believed that planning helps to maintain order in the class. This belief corresponds with Seefeldt and Wasik (2006, p. 115) who argued that routines and schedules imply expected behaviour, therefore planning is an effective discipline strategy. Nicky said *"I make sure that I am well planned because if I am unplanned then that is where the discipline goes off. I try to make my lesson exciting so that learners will be so involved that they will not have time to misbehave."*

From the teachers' comments it was evident that they all have consistent weekly programmes that are followed to help guide them throughout the week. They indicated that they planned lessons according to a Grade R schedule which consisted of different rings such as music, movement, readiness and early morning rings. All three participants believed that this method of planning catered for the child holistically as it catered for their creative, physical, cognitive, emotional and social development. Nicky also mentioned that she planned her play activities to ensure that they had a learning focus, were relevant to the children's experiences and built and extended their knowledge in a constructive and meaningful way. This belief was consistent with research that has shown in a play-based pedagogy, play should be planned and purposeful, and should provide children with challenging and worthwhile activities (BERA Early Years Special Interest Group, 2003). When asked if they stick rigidly to their schedules Gugu indicated that she did, whereas Nicky and Amy mentioned that things

in a Grade R classroom don't always go according to plan and a Grade R teacher must be flexible and adaptable. Nicky said:

*Often when we are teaching we find that we sometimes chop and change depending on situations that arise in the class. As a teacher you have to be flexible and adaptable like a chameleon—Where you are metamorphosing to what the children's needs dictate (May, 20, 2011)*

All three participants believed that their activities or content should be planned using a thematic approach but their readiness activities should be geared towards the development of emergent Mathematics and Literacy skills. They shared the belief that songs, rhymes and chants played an important role in a Grade R classroom and should be planned for. They acknowledged that they used songs during circle time like counting songs, calendar songs and weather songs. They added that songs are also used during group readiness time, especially for mathematics concepts like shape. Gugu commented that she used songs during transition times as she believed that it helped to maintain discipline.

When asked to comment on their beliefs relating to the use of worksheets, Gugu mentioned that her principal did not allow the use of worksheets although she personally preferred to use them. She added that she sneaked in a few worksheets to ensure that her children had some formal exposure. Nicky commented that the use of worksheets must not be ruled out totally. However, she mentioned that in the first term no worksheets are used as children are still developing their hand muscle co-ordination. She stated that *“The emphasis is on active learning and so ‘worksheets’ are kept to a minimum but they are used at appropriate times.”* Apart from worksheets Nicky mentioned that she used a variety of other activities such as construction toys, puzzles, building blocks, legos, stencils, play dough, paint and games to keep children actively engaged while they learn. Amy, however, mentioned that she used numerous worksheets and the workbook given by the Department of Education, as this was the best way to keep the children occupied and prepare them for Grade 1. She added that the worksheets and workbooks served as proof of the child's academic capabilities and she showed it to parents who wanted to see how their child was performing. Research findings by Jambunathan & Caulfield (2006 p. 256) indicate that parental pressures affect use of worksheets.

When asked about their beliefs on the teaching of phonics in Grade R both Gugu and Nicky believed that phonics should be introduced but they avoided the use of a formal approach. They preferred, instead, to build phonic awareness by using what was known and relevant in the children's environment such as the children's names, brand names, objects, events and things of interest. They commented that phonics was taught using action songs, clapping games, rhymes poems and stories. However, Amy believed that the Grade R Foundations for learning Assessment Framework was very phonic heavy and it was much easier to teach it formally using worksheets.

When asked to comment on the curriculum beliefs, Gugu stated that she does not plan what themes and concepts are done in her class. She mentioned that her principal planned the work and gave her the guidelines of what to teach and when to teach it. She stated that she was not able to answer questions about curriculum and that the questions for this section must be directed to the principal. In probing further I asked her if she was familiar with the National Curriculum statement, to which she replied that she was familiar with it as she was studying through UNISA this year, but does not feel competent enough to talk about it. When asked if she was familiar with the Foundations for Learning documents and the resources that were sent to schools, she said she had neither heard of it nor seen it. From this answer I deduced that school was not using the Foundations for Learning documents or the Department workbook that was sent to schools. When asked if she anything knew about the new Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement <sup>28</sup> (CAPS) that was being introduced in 2012 she replied that she had not interacted with the document but was aware that her principal had been attending various meetings and will inform them soon. From this interview I deduced that the principal in School A was actually the 'custodian of pedagogy' in the school and Gugu was the mere technical deliverer, and even if her actions were contrary to her beliefs, she implemented what she was told to do. A brief informal discussion was held with her principal on the curriculum used. The principal responded that the school followed the NCS outcomes but they also used it in conjunction with the Learning through Activity (LTA) documents from the ex-Natal Education Department (NED) as the NCS was not devised

---

<sup>28</sup> This study is based on the NCS and FFL. I only mention CAPs here to illustrate how much is known about the curriculum being implemented next year.

according to developmental domains of a Grade R child and does allow for a play-based method of teaching. She added that they are implementing the three Foundation Phase learning programmes together with learning outcomes and assessment standards set out by the NCS but in an integrated holistic method. She added that the Foundations for Learning (FFL) guidelines and the CAPS documents are very formal in their approach and she had written to the National Education Department about her concerns.

When Nicky was asked to comment on the positive and negative aspects of the present curriculum, her beliefs were similar to the principal of School A. She believed that the NCS does not provide a framework which provides for the developmental domains of a Grade R learner so it had to be adapted to meet the needs of Grade R:

*Our Grade R Programme is an eclectic one that is based on the LTA School Readiness Programme of the ex Natal Education Department and developed further through insights from the present curriculum. We are confident that our present Grade R curriculum meets the National Curriculum Statements in terms of Literacy, Numeracy and Life Skills and moves far beyond them (May, 2011).*

In probing further I asked why the NCS was not the main curriculum used. She pointed out that the NCS had too much emphasis on the acquisition of formal skills. She added that there was no systematic progression or order in the concepts being taught whereas she believed that the LTA curriculum was more extensive, challenging and developed their learners holistically, i.e. in all developmental domains. However, she added that they were implementing the three Foundation Phase learning programmes together with learning outcomes and assessment standards, set out by the NCS but in an integrated holistic method which enabled them to go beyond the curriculum and do much more than the NCS required. She mentioned that the LTA curriculum emphasised learning through play, which was her philosophy of teaching, so she merely filled in the relevant learning outcomes from the NCS to meet departmental requirements where possible. Nicky mentioned that they followed a skills-based and play-enriched curriculum. They work towards a series of learning goals, where learning was firmly set within the context of play and learning was planned to encourage, motivate and inspire:

*Why throw the baby out with the bath water? Our existing practices are already compliant with the principles of the NCS. It's not as if I am not achieving the outcomes from the NCS. I use the NCS as a guideline and in fact I feel I go beyond as I'm preparing the learners in all developmental domains but in well-constructed play and activity based method (May, 20, 2011).*

When asked about the use of the Foundations for Learning Guidelines and Assessment Framework, Nicky responded that they do not focus on it as it was too prescriptive and formal in its approach. She added that they had not even received the workbook and the kit from the Education Department and since they had a curriculum that worked, there was no need to fix something that was not broken. When asked about the CAPS curriculum that will be implemented the following year, she said:

*We have seen the new CAPS document, but it looks like it is basic competencies or outcomes that are emphasised. It is very prescriptive in its themes and content. We find that is pretty much a minimum of what a Grade R is able to achieve. We find that 5/6 year old is capable of much more if they are given enough stimulation and encouragement. We are not too worried about it as we can adapt any curriculum like we are doing now and make things work for our learners (May, 20, 2011).*

Amy, however, was the exception as she articulated that she used the NCS in her planning as it gave her some direction but she found it difficult to match to the three learning programmes, namely Literacy Numeracy and Life Skills to a Grade R planning schedule like the early morning ring or music ring. She added that she was a lot happier when the FFL Guidelines was introduced as it gave her more direction. She believed that the FFL programme offered more guidance as it came with a workbook, lesson plans and prepared stories which enabled her to teach better. This belief concurs with Craft (2002, 2005) who explained how teachers often think that if they implement policies and curricula designed by officials, their teaching will be more successful, and they will produce better learners. She was quite vocal about the lack of co-ordination from the Education Department with regard to the FFL as she had not received the full kit and had to photo copy the lesson plans from another school. She indicated that she had not received the big books and charts that some

schools are talking about. She expressed frustration and anger as she talked about her inability to do her best on account of the incompetency of the Education Department:

*Things from the Department come in snippets and never on time. I do not have the whole Kit. I have to go and find out and make copies of the reproducible worksheets and lesson plans. I have not received the stories and the charts. Why can't they get their act together? (May, 27, 2011).*

When asked about the kind of pedagogy the curriculum promoted Amy commented that she was Montessori trained and believed in the importance of play, but the present curriculum had many outcomes and milestone requirements that needed to be achieved. She mentioned that she taught using a formal approach as it was more structured and helped her complete the syllabus. She maintained that teaching formally helped to create a bit of discipline because she was in control and working in groups can get rowdy. She added that she did allow play opportunities during free play which was mostly outdoors and she often rewarded the children with play time if they were well behaved, or completed their work well. She mentioned that the parents and her principal do not know much about Grade R methodology and she was afraid that if they see her incorporating too much play, they might think she was not doing much work. With regard to her understanding of the CAPS document and its implications for future teaching, she responded that she heard about the CAPS but has not actually seen it as her school does not have an Internet facility to download the documents. She added that that she heard it was merely a list of Grade R expectations and assessments but was concerned that they have not been given copies of the new curriculum yet, nor have they been for orientation or training:

*It's already the end of the second term and we have not been trained. We heard that we were supposed to be trained, but as you know with the Education Department nothing is on time and I guess they will call us last minute and give us a haphazard workshop and then they expect miracles from us (May 27, 2011).*

Analysis of planning files and curriculum documents revealed that all three teachers were compliant with the principles of NCS but only Amy was using the FFL programme. In Amy's class the children were observed used the FFL workbook. However, the structured and scripted lessons that she mentioned she used did not appear in the weeks planning that was

observed. In fact some of the lessons planned such as music, developmental play and free play did not actually take place. Document analysis of lesson plans in all three classes demonstrated that the teachers plan according to a Grade R daily programme, using different methods and styles. Gugu's weekly lesson plan was the only one that reflected the NCS learning outcomes and assessment standards. Gugu is given a detailed guideline by her principal about concepts and activities to be achieved for the term. It became more apparent that Gugu tailored her practice especially the use of play, worksheets and the curriculum to meet the requirements set by her principal and her practice was in fact not a true reflection of her actual beliefs. Research by Wang et al. (2008, p. 244) indicated that their Chinese pre-school sample sometimes changed their teaching plans to reflect their directors' beliefs. All the activities planned on Gugu's schedule for the week were implemented. Lessons catering for song, music drama, art, physical education and story ring were planned and executed. Small group readiness activities and whole class activities were structured in her lesson plans. In practice Gugu reflected the curriculum beliefs of the principal hence the NCS was used in conjunction with the LTA curriculum and the FFL was not implemented as the principal believed that it is too formal in its approach.

Nicky, however, planned autonomously and had a weekly plan that reflected the activities together with the group rotations. Nicky was the most consistent with her beliefs and practice. She believed that planning was important and provided structure which was evident from the moment one walked into her classroom. There was a range of activities prepared in advance and placed on tables in readiness for the children's arrival. Routines were well established for children and they provided a predictable structure. Nicky's planning provided challenges for creative and complex learning and thinking as she used activities to help children extend their ideas and actions through sensitive, informed, well-judged interventions and support. The school bell did not impact on how time was spent in this setting, as the children were well occupied from the time they entered the classroom with plenty of opportunities to play discover and create. She believed that lessons should be carefully planned with lots of play opportunities to develop children holistically and make learning meaningful. This belief and practice concurs with literature that mention that a teachers' ability to implement play as a core component of the ECD curriculum requires careful planning and organisation in order for children's learning to be purposeful (Brownlee & Berthelsen, 2006; Ashiabi, 2007). This

belief was observed in practice as she planned lessons for drama, music, art and physical education within a play-based context. She also planned lessons for school readiness and story rings in a play and interactive learning style. Opportunities for free play in different learning centres were also planned for and observed in practice. Planning documents of all lessons were available. Nicky believed that the NCS curriculum did not provide sufficient curriculum guidance and needed to be supplemented by the LTA curriculum which was observed in practice as the lesson on open and closed lines was from the LTA curriculum. This finding concurs with McLaughlin (1987) and Stoffels (2004) who argue that some teachers tend to 'adopt' only the superficial features of the curriculum. Nicky believed that there was no need to use the FFL programme as they had a working curriculum by marrying the NCS and LTA documents hence; no signs of the FFL programme were visible at this school. All the activities planned were completed during the week. Nicky used two worksheets in the week of my observation but none of them entailed writing. It was evident that both schools A and B used the LTA document to supplement their planning to ensure that the holistic and developmental needs of the learners were catered for.

Amy's lesson plan had no indication of the NCS learning outcomes or the Foundations for Learning milestones covered. Amy mentioned that her planning catered for the child's holistic needs but in practice the movement, music and structured outdoor play activities planned in the lesson plan did not materialise. More time was spent completing the FFL workbook and worksheets. Research by the WSoE echoes this finding as some Grade R classes in Gauteng showed little evidence of the various pre-school rings, and the environment was too formal for Grade R classes (WSoE, 2009, p. 159). Her planning did not indicate the use of worksheets as a resource but they were used in abundance in the classroom with the learners having to complete many written activities. It appeared that the worksheets were Amy's tangible evidence of the learning taking place in the classroom for the parents, the principal and HoD. This study echoes previous findings that teachers respond to parents' pressure by giving more academic-oriented work and teaching directly (Stipek & Byler, 1997, p. 317). She was intent on following lessons that were produced by the Department of Education in the FFL programme, rather than building on the knowledge and understanding that children had brought with them to Grade R. Frame (2003) described this as a technical paradigm with the state playing a prescriptive role and Jansen (2003) also agreed with this



when he spoke of a “top down” approach with teachers following curricula formulated by officials. It is important to mention that my observation took place in the first week of June which was close to the time for reports to be drawn up and it seemed as if the teacher was more assessment focused as the learners had numerous formal exercises to complete in their assessment booklet.

#### **5.4.3.2 Beliefs and Practices relating to Professional Development and Curriculum**

##### **Support**

When asked what kind of support they received with regard to curriculum implementation and to identify what support they may need, all three teachers believed that very little support is received from the Education Department. Amy believed that the Education Department was very slow in co-ordinating any programme and often she found herself asking friends and colleagues for support. Gugu and Nicky mentioned that they received huge support from their principals. Both Nicky and Gugu had regular planning and curriculum development meetings with their principals and other colleagues and believed that were assisted professionally by them to become better teachers. Moon and Leach (2008, p. 28–29) explain that effective pedagogy is relevant to all contexts, and is a collaborative process between colleagues. They remind us that teachers should be researchers in their own settings; doing the best they can for the children they teach. Gugu and Nicky believed that the curriculum and planning meetings held at their schools enabled them to develop their strengths as they talked to each other. Nicky stated:

*We do not count on the Education Department for support with regard to the curriculum. We get huge support from our principal and colleagues at school. The more seasoned teachers mentor the new teachers. We work as a team and are constantly engaging in new ideas, surfing the Internet and learning from each other. If there are courses available that will benefit us, then we are lucky as our school will pay for us to attend (May, 20, 2011).*

Gugu mentioned that she relied on the support of her principal and colleagues, but she would like more opportunities to learn from other schools and see how learning took place there. She went so far as to state that she even would not mind if I gave her some feedback on her teaching skills after my observation, as she really wanted to learn and do her best. She added

that she was currently studying through UNISA to further her studies in the Foundation Phase hoping to find a position that paid better.

Amy, however, believed that she received little support from her principal who did not have much knowledge regarding the Grade R curriculum. Her HoD focused more on Grades 1-3 and the Education Department lacked co-ordination and efficiency. She mentioned that she would like to study further but her salary was very low and she was unable to fund her studies:

*My principal does not know much about Grade R. I also do not get much help from my HoD as she focuses more on the Grade 1-3. I attend cluster meetings but it is not really substantive or of much help. The Education Department does not co-ordinate and disseminate information effectively and sometimes we are unaware of meetings taking place as our school did not get a notice. All schools do not get the same information. Sometimes I feel like I am all on my own. I do not have the money to study further as we get paid so little (May 27, 2011).*

In sitting on planning and curriculum meetings in Both Nicky's and Gugu's school, it was observed both these school show deep commitment in making the best of what they had by supporting each other (See section E6, Appendix E). Listening to their meetings it was evident that strong leadership on the part of their principals and support from colleagues played a pivotal role in their teaching practices. This finding is supported by literature that insists that teachers require a comprehensive system of support (Bascia & Hargreaves, 2000; Ryan & Ackerman, 2005) and effective school management (Jansen, 1999). The only concern was Gugu's lack of engagement with the curriculum which appeared to be an important professional development aspect that was clearly lacking in her school. However, she was making an attempt to address this as she indicated that she was studying through UNISA.

Amy often expressed her anger and frustration on her lack of support. No planning or curriculum meetings or interactions took place in the week of the research study with the principal, other colleagues or the Junior Primary HoD. Poor pay contributed to her lack of finances, hence, she is unable to study further to upgrade her qualifications or attend

professional development workshops as many do involve some cost. A vision that came to mind when sitting in Amy's class was one of a lone pilot flying an overloaded airplane (43 learners) with only 1 unqualified air hostess (Zulu speaking assistant) over an air space that had many air pockets (problems encountered) with an inefficient control tower (Education Department). The journey of the passengers (43 learners) was bound to have dire consequences.

In summary, it was clear that all three teachers believed that planning was necessary in order to have direction and purpose when teaching, but only two teachers' lesson plans matched the activities observed in the classroom. With regard to the curriculum, two schools were using the NCS in conjunction with the LTA curriculum of the Ex-NED and both these schools had strong leadership and high correlations with research on best practice, whereas the one school that was using the NCS and the FFL documents had the least resemblance to research on best practice as insufficient support from the Education Department, large class numbers and inadequate resources were constraining factors that hampered service delivery. Lack of access to professional development from the Education Department is a matter of great concern as findings in this study highlight that some schools are fortunate to have strong leadership and professional development opportunities that occur internally, whereas other schools lack any form of support internally or from external sources. Lack of finances also appeared to hinder access to professional development.

#### **5.4.4 Theme 4 –Beliefs and Practices relating to Assessment**

The term 'assessment' is defined as the process of obtaining information that is used to make educational decisions about students, to give feedback to the student and parents about children's progress, strengths, and weaknesses, to judge instructional effectiveness and curricular adequacy, and to inform policy (Kellaghan & Greaney 2001, p. 19). The findings regarding the beliefs assessment in the three Grade R research sites are that assessment is necessary to help teachers reflect, plan and report to parents.

When asked about beliefs on assessment and what should be assessed in Grade R, all three participants believed that assessment was necessary to help teachers reflect on their practice and helped them to ascertain whether or not the children in their class have met the key

objectives or outcomes. They believed that assessment helped them reflect and gauge how successful their teaching was and sometimes their findings reveal that they have to adapt or change the way they are teaching something to help a child understand better. According to Fullan (1993, p. 5), reflection of practice should become a habit as teachers need to have an inbuilt capacity that consists of the habits and skills required to engage in on-going corrective analysis and action. The importance of reflective practice is also mentioned by Tillema & Imants (1995) as a pre-requisite for growth in competence. They described teaching as a 'craft' which develops over time through reflective practice. All the teachers in the study endorsed the need to assess learners holistically. Nicky said:

*For instance there is a child who when it comes to language based activities, his listening skills are shocking as he does not appear interested but when it comes to physical and creative activities his listening skills are brilliant, because that captures him (May 20, 2011).*

Amy indicated:

*I think it is very important as children develop differently in different areas. Some children might be better with physical activities and are not artistic and creatively inclined. You might find some who very confident and talk and others are reserved and shy. We cannot just assess on one aspect but look at the whole child and find ways of assessing their social, physical, creative emotional and cognitive abilities (May, 27, 2011).*

Gugu mentioned:

*When we assess-we look at all aspects of grade R learning such as social, physical emotional, cognitive etc. Some children are quite. I have to help them, encourage them to talk so this is their social and emotion assessment. We look at the children creative abilities in art music and drama (May, 6, 2011).*

When asked to comment on how often assessment was done and the types of techniques used all three participants believed that informal observation was the most widely used technique and that assessment should be on-going. Nicky commented "From the time they walk into school we are assessing them without them knowing it. You watch how they enter the class. How they say goodbye to their parents, where they leave their bags, do they have to be reminded all the time about the morning routine." All three participants revealed that they

had a formal assessment plan of specific skills or outcomes that needed to be assessed. They mentioned that this was done through specifically designed tasks and they have a key/rating system to assess how well a child was performing. They mentioned that they assessed whether the child can do it totally on their own or if they need help or direction. Gugu and Nicky had similar strategies on how they approached assessment as both teachers mentioned that they chose three/four children a day as special targets for observation and made notes about the children's actions and responses. They believed that by what a child volunteered and did they could gauge the child's understanding and skill. In this way they assess number memory, story memory, listening skills, speaking skills, language skills, cutting skills, artistic skills, motor skills and social interaction skills. Amy was the only participant who mentioned that she had created a formal assessment booklet that the class worked through as a whole, but with oral activities and outdoor activities, she assesses a few learners at a time. She mentioned that worksheets in the assessment booklet were a valuable assessment tool and served as evidence of performance for parents.

All three participants believed that assessment helped identify children's strengths and weaknesses and helped give feedback to their parents. Gugu and Nicky revealed that they sent out reports to parents in the second and fourth term, but in the first and third term they have one-on-one parent teacher consultations. Amy, however, sent out reports every term and specific parents were called in for an interview if the need arose. Gugu and Nicky also reported that they had casual interactions with parents when they came to leave or fetch their child. Nicky added that sometimes when a child had excelled in a particular area they send home a certificate or a special note to the parent. She also mentioned that they would never send out a report where something was a surprise, especially if a child needed additional support such as occupational or speech therapy. If there was a problem parents were called in and were offered guidance as the school had access to a remedial teacher, occupational therapist and speech therapist who worked part time on the school campus. However, parents paid separately for their services. Gugu also mentioned that children who are experiencing major difficulties are discussed with the principal, who then interviewed parents and offered them advice on how to support their children. Both Nicky and Gugu's comments concur with the statement made by Kostelnik et al. (2004, pp. 183-184) who stated that educators also need to collect and document information to identify children who might

benefit from special help or additional health services, and to report children's progress to their families.

The practice of assessment was visible in all three research sites (See section F, Appendix E). Nicky in School B was observed assessing a learner at 7:30 in the morning on day one of the observation. The school day starts at 7:30 and a free play session was scheduled on the weekly planner. While the other learners were involved in free play, Nicky had a young learner next to her completing a threading activity with different coloured beads. During the week spent in her class Nicky was observed making notes in her observation book as different learners were observed formally and informally. During the early morning ring in both Nick's and Gugu's classes, target learners<sup>29</sup> were chosen to perform certain activities like counting, answering questions and completing the weather and calendar. Gugu also kept an observation book in which she recorded children's responses. Both Gugu and Nicky had a focused assessment strategy that involved observation of target learners for each day, with written observations being kept. Their reported beliefs on assessing learners holistically matched their practice as they observed the target learners during school readiness activities, movement, free play, and other creative activities.

Document analysis revealed that in Gugu's class each learner had a continuous assessment checklist for the year that was filled in by Gugu for each term to keep track of a learner's progress. Nicky also had a checklist on skills that needed to be achieved in each developmental domain. Amy on the other hand was not observed performing any other form of assessment except the use of formal worksheets. When asked if it was possible to see her assessment file she stated that she was busy sorting it out as it was time for second term reports to be ready. Hence, I had no opportunity to peruse through it. The reports sent to parents by both Amy and Gugu were very similar and in keeping with Departmental guidelines with little information on learner's abilities in different areas of development. However, the report sent to parents by Nicky was very detailed and holistic in its approach as it reported on all developmental domains of a child and was different from the Departmental guidelines. This practice was consistent with the DAP approach to assessment which recommended that teachers embrace a holistic approach and

---

<sup>29</sup> Target learners- refer to specifically identified learners who are chosen for observation on the day and the teachers records observations. Each day the teachers choose different target learners.

appraise children's developmental domains (Kostelnik et al., 2004, p. 187; Seefeldt & Wasik, 2008, p. 149). Gugu and Nicky reported that they believed parents should be informed if a child needed additional support from professionals such as an occupational therapist or speech therapist. This belief was visible in practice in Nicky's class as a speech therapist present on the school site fetched a child from the class during my classroom observation session.

In conclusion all three teachers held beliefs on the importance of assessment in helping teachers reflect, plan and report to parents but the assessment techniques used were different. Both Nicky and Gugu were consistent with their beliefs and practices as they catered for the holistic assessment of a child. However, Amy's practice did not reflect her beliefs as the assessment techniques used did not cater for the learners holistic capabilities. In the week spent observing in Amy's class her approach to assessment was limited to the children's cognitive abilities through worksheets, and talents such as musical and artistic capabilities that are non-cognitive, were excluded as those planned lessons were not conducted during the week.

#### **5.4.5 Theme 5- Beliefs and Practices relating to Parental Involvement**

The term "parent involvement" is used broadly as it includes several different forms of participation in education and with the schools. Parents can support their children's schooling by attending school functions and responding to school obligations (parent-teacher conferences, for example). They can become more involved in helping their children improve their schoolwork--providing encouragement, modeling desired behavior (such as reading for pleasure), monitoring homework, and actively tutoring their children at home (Cotton, 1989). The findings regarding the nature of parental involvement in the three Grade R research sites indicate that parents are viewed as vital components in the education of a child and that the lack of parental involvement can impact negatively on a child's education. All three participants believed that parental involvement was essential and could not be over emphasised. The teachers believed that it was important for them to engage with parents as they played a significant role in a child's development and education. All three participants believed that parents and the teacher must work together to support the growth of children and that teachers had an obligation to keep parents informed. Barnes & Lehr (2005, p. 111) identify teacher obligations with regards to parent involvement: "teachers have four major

roles in relation to parents: to facilitate a child's growth through parent contact, to support and empower parents in their parenting role; to provide resources; and to facilitate the transition of parents and children to their next environment." The teachers believed that parental involvement encouraged children and helped significantly with improving learner achievement as the home was the first place of learning. Gugu said "*The home can be a very stimulating learning environment. If parents expose their children to books, read to them talk to them, they are helping their child learn and develop*" Nicky mentioned: "*The home is the first place of learning and I think parents don't fully realise that*" Amy commented: "*The parents and the home are the first teachers that a child comes across.*"

All three participants believed that parents assisted with fund raising efforts, and sometimes with contributing resources, especially recycled materials. Nicky mentioned that sometimes too much involvement could be a bit of a problem. She stated that this year for the first time she had to tell a parent to back off, as the parent organised everything for the child and was not giving the child a chance to be independent and do things for herself. She added that sometimes parents have unrealistic expectations and come in and say they don't want any of this playing stuff as they want to see their child learning. She mentioned that she often counselled parents that playing was how Grade R children learnt:

*They want to see written work and content and that is how they think they can gauge how much their child has learnt. When they come in they want to see their children's book which is their memory of their school experience and it hard to relate to them that in grade R learning is more practical than written. Often we have to educate the parents on our method of teaching and about the holistic development of the child*  
(May 20, 2011)

Gugu and Amy agreed that some parents tend to have unrealistic expectations and are often anxious about their children's progress. Robinson & Diaz, (2006, p. 51) noted that parents are increasingly under pressure to ensure that their children succeed and survive the education system and that parental anxiety about their children's academic success begins in the pre-school years. Both Nicky and Gugu mentioned that they respond to the demands by parents by trying to convince them that Grade R was play-based and formal instruction was not included in the Grade R programme. However, Amy's approach



was to respond to parental demands by complying with them as she used numerous worksheets to indicate proof of learning.

When asked if they believed that lack of parental involvement hindered learning, all three participants acknowledged that it did affect learning and puts added pressure on the teacher. All three participants believed that parents are far too busy and cannot help their children as much as they would like to. Nicky indicated:

*Parents are too busy and cannot support their children as much as we would like. That is why we had to start this language ring. Parents are working hard and they are exhausted when they come home. They do not have the time to read to their children. There is also this tendency to want to opt out. On the one hand we understand it but on the other hand we can't endorse it. We try to encourage parents to take responsibility. Many parents think that quality time is "let's go and get 3 DVDs and a bucketful of KFC." Technology has played a role in diminishing parental involvement. A huge amount of money is spent but the end value is much less than if they took the child to the beach/park/played a game/ worked in the garden etc. Our children are more technology literate, cell phones, wee Nintendo etc. but they lack cutting skills and social skill (May 20, 2011).*

Gugu advised:

*There are some parents we don't see even when we set up appointments with them. Some parents leave their children with care givers and they are working away from home. Some of the children do not have anyone to help them with their homework. The care giver cannot really help the child. Parents today just don't seem to have the time to read to the children or even play with them (May, 6, 2011).*

Amy mentioned *"A child who is helped at home always performs far better than those who do not get help."*

From their comments it was clear that lack of parental involvement was problematic at schools and teaching and learning would be easier if parents took an active in role in the process. When asked to comment on how they catered for parents from diverse language and

cultural backgrounds all three participants mentioned that they were equipped to deal with the issue if it arose. Gugu mentioned:

*Our school has parents from many language backgrounds. I can speak Sotho, Zulu, Xhosa and Tshwane. My principal can speak French to parents from West Africa and Central Africa. If there is language like Swahili – that we cannot speak, then we get someone who can help us translate. Parents are encouraged to put their children in the after care at school so that they can be helped with their homework if their parents are unable to help them. My principal is very helpful and her door is always open (May, 6, 2011).*

Nicky articulated:

*Most of the parents who send their learners to our school are from middle class backgrounds and can understand English. On the rare occasion that there is a parent who needs help with translation we will find someone who can help. We are aware of some religious events that take place—like fasting in Ramadaan<sup>30</sup> and so we will not schedule events on those evenings as we know some parents will not be able to attend (May, 20, 2011)*

Amy commented:

*Most of my children are IsiZulu, so sometimes I get my helper to write a note in isiZulu in their books if I want to get in touch with a parent or I want to pass a message. If I have an interview with them then my helper is there to help translate. But bear in mind that I only have this support this year because last year I really battled to communicate with the parents (Amy, 27, 2011).*

Evidence from the data (see section G, Appendix E) shows that in both Nicky's and Gugu's class parents were observed dropping off their children and having casual interactions with the teacher. In Nicky's class a little boy was observed tugging at his mums hand as he wanted her see his artwork on the wall. Some of the parents in Gugu's school were observed bringing in waste material. In Amy's class the children were a lot earlier at school than the teacher who arrived at 8am when school officially starts, so no interaction with parents were observed. However, parental involvement through

---

<sup>30</sup> Ramadaan- The ninth month of the Muslim year, during which strict fasting is observed from sunrise to sunset.

fundraising was observed as children returned money together with fundraising forms that were given to them for their upcoming fun walk. As the time spent in each school was limited to one week it was insufficient to observe more parental involvement.

## **5. 5. Conclusion**

In summary, this chapter illuminated themes that emerged about early childhood teachers' stated beliefs and observed practice relating to pedagogy in Grade R classes. The data presented highlighted the variations and similarities in the stated beliefs and practice. A quote by Johann von Goethe<sup>31</sup> came to mind as I summarised my findings: "To think is easy. To act is hard. But the hardest thing in the world is to act in accordance with your thinking." The findings of this research study suggest that not all Grade R teachers taught according to their beliefs. This study shows that teachers cannot be categorised as fitting into one, lineal teacher-type. In fact, the teaching beliefs and practices varied for different contexts.

In summary, Gugu in School A, often changed her beliefs to adapt to the beliefs of her principal who was the 'custodian of pedagogy' in the school. However, some of her practices matched her beliefs, such as the creation of a warm, inviting, learning environment and assessing the learners holistically. She worked in a well-resourced resourced school and was directed by her principal on matters of the curriculum and approaches to teaching. She was making an attempt to develop herself professionally by studying through UNISA.

Nicky in school B was the most consistent as almost all of her practices matched her beliefs. She was confident, experienced and worked in a highly supportive workplace. She has access to excellent resources and regularly participated in professional development by working with a professional network of like-minded teachers. One inconsistency that arose was related to catering for diversity and multicultural classrooms as she believed that the classroom should reflect the cultural diversity of the children but in practice songs rhymes, stories and resources from other cultures were lacking.

---

<sup>31</sup> *Johann Wolfgang von Goethe* (1749-1832), is German poet, playwright, novelist, and natural philosopher. His quotes are available at [http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/authors/j/johann\\_wolfgang\\_von\\_goeth.html](http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/authors/j/johann_wolfgang_von_goeth.html)

Amy in School C however, was the most inconsistent of all three research participants as majority of her practices did not match her beliefs. Amy cited many challenges that impacted on her practice such as large numbers, inadequate funding and lack of support from the parents, school and the Education Department.

My journey towards answering my research question: What are the beliefs and practices of Grade R teachers within a context of effective pedagogy in selected Grade R/Reception Year classes in the greater Durban area of KwaZulu-Natal revealed many variations as well similarities. The three cases presented have provided evidence of the complexity of understanding beliefs and practices of teachers. There were no simple answers; teachers' beliefs are not easily categorised and appear to be different in practice due to the complex social realities of the different classrooms. Effective pedagogy in the Grade R classes was supported and constrained by many factors that were identified by teachers.

In the next chapter I present a synthesis of previous chapters, reflect on my research methodology, revisit my data summaries, draw conclusions based on my findings, and suggest implications of my study for policy, practice and future research.

## **Chapter 6**

### **Conclusions and Implications of the Study**

#### **6.1 Introduction**

Philosophy is a way of thinking; it is concerned with having good reasons for your beliefs and not about the beliefs themselves (King, 2004, p. 9).

Teachers' beliefs and understandings reported from the data in Chapter Five highlight selected Grade R teachers' philosophies or beliefs on teaching and reveal some insight into their ways of thinking and teaching. The teachers in the study value their beliefs and have good reasons for their current beliefs and practices. The main purpose of this study was to use a qualitative approach to examine teacher beliefs and practices, in Grade R classrooms, within a context of effective pedagogy. In this concluding chapter, I revisit the research question and provide a summary of the main findings and conclusions of the research. I address the challenges that teachers faced in the study as these challenges impacted on their beliefs and practices. In addition, I highlight the implications of the study and suggest recommendations to help improve Grade R practice. Furthermore, suggestions are made for future research. Finally, I provide concluding remarks on this remarkable, informative, and enlightening journey.

#### **6.2 Summary of Main Findings**

This section summarises the main findings of the study, and answers the research question: What are the beliefs and practices of Grade R teachers within a context of effective pedagogy in selected Grade R/Reception Year classes in the greater Durban area of KwaZulu-Natal?

In the field of Grade R, the never ending debate of what are the 'best practices' for children to experience is ongoing. The Grade R teachers in my study reported on a variety of beliefs and understandings that they believed was important for effective pedagogy. However, the study revealed that the Grade R teachers had one belief in common: they must be committed and passionate about their work and try to do their best for the children in their care, despite the challenges they may face. They described themselves as having a strong sense of responsibility for the well-being of the children and enjoyed working with young children.

The results of the study indicate that teachers have beliefs and practices that are not always consistent. A common inconsistency displayed by all three teachers was their limited provision for a multicultural teaching and learning environment that reflected their beliefs that children need to feel represented and valued in the classroom. All three classrooms observed had children from diverse backgrounds. An attempt to bridge this gap was made by School C who employed an IsiZulu helper to translate and assist learners in the class. However, songs, rhymes, charts, stories, toys and pictures reflecting different cultures were clearly lacking. Teachers need to acknowledge that South Africa is not a culturally homogenous society. It is made up of a cultural mix that is close to being representative of a cross section of the world's population. A factor that exacerbates this cultural mix is the extraordinary influx of economic and political refugees/immigrants largely from continental Africa. A further compounding factor is that many are from countries where English is not the lingua franca (spoken language). It is important that this study acknowledges the difficulty faced by some teachers who have to bridge not just one, but an amalgam of culturally diverse learners. The findings in this study indicate that teachers need to develop knowledge and skills to succeed in teaching diverse children.

All the teachers in the study expressed beliefs that valued the use of concrete materials, for various reasons such as: it makes learning more meaningful, it actively engages learners, it is useful in enhancing physical, social and emotional development and it makes learning enjoyable for the children. Schools A and B that were Ex-Model C schools prior to 1994 were highly resourced, with sufficient apparatus and concrete materials to enable meaningful learning. Classroom observations in these schools showed teachers used a variety of concrete materials in their lessons especially during school readiness lessons and free play. However, the use of a variety of concrete materials to enhance learning was lacking in School C as the school lacked the resources and the space needed to foster exploratory, meaningful learning. Learners were told what to do and how to do it, without being given opportunities to explore and discover for themselves.

All three teachers in the study believed that children learned best through play. However, there were significant variations of the implementation of play in practice. Data from the interviews revealed that one teacher in study did not like too much play during school

readiness lessons and preferred to use it during free play time. However, she was forced to adhere to the play-based method when teaching all aspects of the Grade R curriculum as it was the belief of her school principal to which she had to conform. Another teacher expressed that even though she believed play was the best way in which children learnt, she did not implement a play-based practice, due to lack of space, inadequate resources, parental pressure and large numbers of learners in her classroom. These factors hindered effective practice in her classroom. Only one teacher, who expressed the belief that well-constructed play is vital in Grade R, used a play-based approach in almost all aspects of the Grade R curriculum.

This study established that all three teachers expressed child-centred beliefs, However only two teachers in the study subscribed to child related practices in the classroom. One teacher in the study was under enormous pressure to use a teacher directed approach due to parental pressure, a large number of learners and a lack of resources.

All the teachers in the study believed that planning was important as it gives them direction and helps achieve the outcomes outlined in the curriculum. The data showed that only two teachers in the study were able to plan independently and implement their teaching schedules according to their own choices. However, one teacher in the study is given guidance on what to teach, how to teach it and when to teach it, as the principal is the ‘custodian of pedagogy’ in her school and she is the technical deliverer. All the teachers in the study believed that lessons should be planned according to a Grade R schedule and must cater for the holistic development of children. However, document analysis and classroom observation in one school revealed teacher planning activities such as music and free play on paper that did not materialise in practice.

Data from the interviews, classroom observation and document analysis revealed that two teachers in the study believed that the NCS policy directive does not cater for all the developmental domains of Grade R learners. They adopted superficial features of the NCS curriculum as they use the Ex-NED, Learning through Activity curriculum, as their guide. Only one teacher in the study used the NCS and believed that the FFL guidelines provided direction.

One teacher in the study expressed her concern that she had not been provided with information or documents on the upcoming CAPS curriculum being implemented in 2012. The second teacher is waiting for her principal to inform her about the CAPS curriculum and the third teacher is not too concerned about the CAPS curriculum saying that she is able to adapt any curriculum using ideas from the LTA curriculum as her guide. The teachers believed that the Department of Education failed to provide sufficient support for effective curriculum implementation.

All the teachers in this study believed that assessment was necessary to help them plan for children's learning, and to provide feedback to parents about their children's progress. They used varied strategies for assessment with one teacher using a formal assessment booklet that served as evidence of progress. Two teachers in the study believed that a target assessment approach is the most practical method of assessment in Grade R.

All three Grade R teachers in the study believed that parental involvement is important. However, they also believed that parents can be pressurising and sometimes question a teacher's practice. The teachers commented that parents do not understand the kind of pedagogy implemented in Grade R. The teachers in School A and B used this opportunity to educate parents on the play-based approach used in Grade R. However, the teacher in School C succumbs to parental pressure and uses a formal approach with worksheets and workbooks to show parents evidence of their children's work.

In my quest to understand teacher beliefs and practices in the context of pedagogy in Grade R classrooms, this study found significant relationships between Grade R teachers' pedagogic beliefs and their practice. This study found that there was not necessarily a set of universal beliefs or practices when teaching children. Each teacher held their own set of beliefs which they sometimes modified to suit their unique circumstances. This study found that the contexts in which teachers teach sometimes dictate how they structure children's educational experiences. It revealed that teachers experienced challenges that affected/hindered effective practice which will be discussed in greater detail in the next section.



### **6.3. Challenges that Impacted on Teachers' Beliefs and Practices.**

Several challenges were highlighted in this study that impacted on teacher beliefs and practice. These challenges are discussed below.

#### **6.3.1 Class Size**

The data from this study showed that large classes are prevalent in lower socio-economic schools. All three teachers had varied beliefs but the teachers in the smaller classes showed more characteristics of effective practice than the teacher in the larger class. Researchers argue that any number above 30 could be considered to have a negative impact on effective practice as it is not supported in terms of space and resources (WSoE, 2009, p.155). This study echoes this finding, one school had 43 learners in a class and often the teacher cited this as the reason for her inability to teach through the medium of play even though she believed that it was important. The two other classes that had less than 25 learners used the play approach to teaching. International standards recommend that class size for pre-school and kindergarten should not exceed 16 children in a group (The Supreme Education Council Education Institute, 2007).

#### **6.3.2 Space and Resources**

Teachers in the study expressed beliefs that supported the use of concrete materials and creation of different learning centres to enable effective practice and holistic development. The daily programme in a Grade R classroom consists of activities such as block construction, building puzzles, modelling clay, fantasy play, gardening, outdoor free play, teacher-directed movement and music rings, and listening to stories. In order to achieve the curriculum needs adequately, space and resources are necessary. In both School A and B, the availability of space and resources was more than adequate and it enabled teachers to cater for the holistic development of learners. Data from classroom observation showed that in these schools, children had opportunities to play freely both indoors and outdoors with an abundance of varied resources. Unfortunately, School C was not as privileged. The classroom was overcrowded and the children were confined to their desks and were often interfering with each other or chatting. Similarly, the EPPE study (Siraj-Blatchford, & Sylva, 2002), found where the physical environment and space was better a decrease in “antisocial/worried” behaviour was shown. Resources in School C was insufficient to cater

for the large number of learners as an adequate amount of space per child is necessary to implement the Grade R curriculum which requires learning centres and corners that are creatively arranged to promote communication, exploration, creative expression and self-awareness. Researchers in the WSoE study indicated that constraints within the teaching and learning environment have a negative impact on optimal learning opportunities (WSoE, 2009, p.162). The findings in this study echo this as the learners in School C, due to inadequate facilities are deprived of opportunities to play, imagine, and create. A lack of space and resources impacted on the ability of the Grade R teacher in School C to implement her beliefs in practice.

### **6.3.3 Curriculum**

All the teachers in the study had experienced a number of curriculum reforms for Grade R during their teaching career, with the most recent reform involving the FFL programme which was introduced in 2009. It is important to mention that another curriculum reform, CAPS, is on the brink of implementation in 2012. The data from this study showed that not all the teachers were using the NCS curriculum and the FFL guidelines. Researchers argue that at the classroom level teacher beliefs can facilitate or inhibit curriculum reform (Burkhardt, Fraser & Ridgway, 1990; Koehler & Grouws, 1992). The participants in my study adopted the departmental directives regarding lesson planning and assessment reports, but for two teachers in this study, their instructional practice revealed very limited changes from the Ex-NED Learning through Activity curriculum. Their main reason for doing so was their belief that the NCS is inadequate on its own. Nicky in School B and the principal of school A, who is the ‘custodian of pedagogy’, believed that the FFL programme was unrelated to their beliefs about teaching and learning in Grade R as it is too formal and skills based, therefore, they totally rejected the programme. This finding concurs with other research findings that maintain some teachers either fail to take up reforms or actively resist innovations (Fullan, 1993), and yet others make surface changes to their teaching by adopting some of the more easily assimilated practices into their pedagogical repertoire (Windschilt, 2002). The teacher in School C implemented both, the NCS and FFL, but due to lack of adequate training, finds implementation challenging in making the curriculum work according to the Grade R schedule and needs of the learners. Other researchers have also found that changes in curriculum reform take place slowly (Snow-Renner & Lauer, 2005)

with some teachers continuing to struggle with aspects of curriculum change several years after their introduction (Pasley, 2002). Curriculum challenges, therefore, proved to be a contributing factor that affected the ability of teachers to put their beliefs into practice.

#### **6.3.4 Teacher Qualification**

Data from the interviews revealed that all three teachers in the study had different qualifications and varied beliefs. Much of the international literatures have questioned the qualification requirements of Early Childhood Education (ECE) teachers (Ackerman, 2006; Wallet, 2006). However, there appears to be agreement that a four-year bachelor degree with specialisation in ECE should be the minimum qualification (Lobman & Ryan, 2007). Research has shown that although qualifications do not equate to competence, a positive correlation has been found between professional development and effective classroom practice if it is accompanied by adequate support (Fullan 1993; Hargreaves 2005; Walsh et al., 2006, Hirsh-Pasek et al., 2009). Nicky, who possessed a B-Ed. degree and had 12 years of teaching experience was more consistent about the beliefs she articulated and her classroom practice, as the data demonstrated that she was able to implement teaching and learning through play using Vygotsky's social constructivist approach. This finding is echoed in the EPPE study (Siraj-Blatchford, & Sylva, 2002), where higher levels of teacher qualifications were associated with positive aspects of adult-child interaction, which in turn benefited child outcomes. Classroom observations showed that both Gugu with her Educare Diploma and 9 years of teaching experience, and Amy with her Montessori Diploma and 7 years of teaching experience demonstrated some inconsistencies with their beliefs and lacked the ability to skilfully implement play to enhance learning. Some researchers found that the belief-action relationship may differ for teachers with varying amount of experience or professional training (Peters & Sutton, 1984; Rosenthal, 1991). Similar deductions were made in this study.

#### **6.3.5 Inclusion**

A major challenge found in this study which was consistent in all three research sites was the inability of the teachers to tailor the curriculum and their pedagogic practices to suit the cognitive and social cultural understandings of each child. The teachers in the study believed that every child's individuality should be valued and accommodated but expressed that

catering for cultural diversity in their classroom practice was challenging. Data from classroom observations showed children in the study were not given opportunities to sing, label items or talk about their cultures regularly. Sharing of multi-cultural understandings seemed to only take place when discussing religious holidays or cultural observances. Learner's cultural diversity appeared to be undermined in all three contexts. Jones and Fennimore (1990, p. 16) stated "It is acknowledged in literature that every culture brings habits of thought, resources, and contexts which have built into them vehicles that promote learning and inquiry, and accordingly, that children of any culture can and should have curriculum and instructional practices that draw from that culture." Yet, teachers in this study believed that it was important to cater for multiculturalism and diversity that is prevalent in their classes but appeared to lack the insight and training to use these diversities as opportunities to enhance learning. Research in Gauteng by the Wits School of Education in 2009 highlighted that many Grade R teachers appeared to have difficulty with concepts of differentiation and tailoring the curriculum to meet the specific needs of each individual child while still maintaining group cohesion (WSOE, 2009, p.157). This study revealed similar results. Lack of training and insight in catering for multiculturalism and diversity in today's classrooms appears to be a major challenge affecting teachers' beliefs and practices.

### **6.3.6 Parental Pressure**

Teachers in the study believed that parental support is essential but also expressed that parents can be a challenge as they sometimes question their practice. The teachers mentioned that they are often presented with an ongoing challenge of parental pressure on the use of play-based learning and that there is little tangible evidence of learning to present to parents. Goldstein (2007, p. 380) warns that the increasing demand for accountability and mastery of academic skills has made kindergarten teaching more complex as the need to provide parents with feedback about their children's progress proved to be a challenge for Amy and hindered her practice. Amy 'gives in' to parental pressure by preparing formal tasks which involve written work completion on a daily basis, neglecting the holistic needs of the learners. Nicky and Gugu encounter similar pressures but they used this as an opportunity to explain the unique nature of pedagogy in Grade R which caters for the holistic development of children through constructive play opportunities.

### **6.3.7 Principals Expectations**

Gugu and Amy encountered challenges in implementing their beliefs on account of pressure from their principals. Gugu preferred a more formal approach to teaching but was forced to comply with the pedagogical beliefs of her principal. Amy felt pressured by her principal's expectations which she felt is designed for a formal approach, hence she uses numerous worksheets and the FFL workbook as proof of learning instead of implementing a play based learning approach which she believed was important.

### **6.3.8 Professional Development**

Teachers in the study believed that professional development is important since the curriculum is constantly changing. They believed that the Education Department lacks co-ordination and is incompetent in implementing quality professional development programmes. They are therefore forced to seek assistance from other sources. Both Gugu and Nicky were fortunate to have principals who offered professional support as they were seasoned Grade R professionals themselves with Nicky's principal conducting part time pre-school training courses. Both these teachers receive on-going collegial support with regard to planning, teaching and assessment in their weekly staff meetings. Gugu has taken the initiative to develop professionally and is currently studying through UNISA for a degree in ECE. Amy, however, is not as fortunate as the lack of professional development impacts negatively on her beliefs and practice. The clear lack of curriculum support from the Education Department results in Amy implementing a curriculum that she does not fully understand. Elmore and Burney (1997, p. 1) argue that there is a growing consensus among educational reformers that professional development for teachers and administrators lies at the centre of all educational reform and instructional improvement. This lack of provision by the Education Department is of great concern. This study has clearly shown that Grade R teachers, especially those in similar contexts as Amy may be floundering and failing to implement the curriculum correctly.

## **6.4 Implications of the Study and Recommendations for Improvement in Grade R Practice.**

This section summarises the results of the study. I will draw related conclusions and highlight the implications of my study for policy, practice and further research, according to the main research themes.

### **6.4.1 Learning Environment**

Teacher's beliefs about their learning environment showed that they believed a positive learning environment was essential for quality practice. Siraj-Blatchford and Sylva (2002) in their recent DfES-sponsored study of effective pedagogy in the early years, suggested that effective pedagogy is both 'teaching' and the provision of instructive learning environments. Two teachers in the study that taught in former Ex-Model C schools were the most successful in creating 'an instructive learning environment' that catered for the holistic development of the learners. These schools were adequately resourced with sufficient space to enable active engagements of learners. The data showed that children in both these schools were able to move freely and interact with both their environment and interests and a variable range of participants. Activities were available for children to select and develop their own interests.

Unfortunately, School C, which catered for children from lower socio economic backgrounds, was not as resourced, which impacted on the learning environment of the Grade R teacher in this school. The learning environment in this school was restrictive as children were confined to their desks with limited opportunities to interact and play freely. The use of concrete resources to facilitate learning was inadequate and insufficient as there were large numbers of learners in this class. The study highlights that large class sizes, space and inadequate resources affected the creation of an interactive and 'instructive learning environment.' Policy makers, departmental officials and school administrators need to take note of the negative impact of class sizes, the lack of space and inadequate resources on 'effective' pedagogy as was evident in School C of the research study. The learning environment is viewed as the 'third teacher' in the Reggio Emilia Approach and needs to be highly resourced, spacious, colourful and relaxed to ensure quality teaching and learning. Budgets for learning and teacher support materials for Quintile 5 schools like School C, need to be revisited as the school lacked sufficient resources and space. A specific budget should

be allocated for the improvement in Grade R classes as principals may spend more money on resources in other Grades, neglecting Grade R. Charts, pictures, toys and other resources needed for effective practice in Grade R should be made available to all schools by the Education Department. Regulations regarding the maximum number of learners in a Grade R class should be considered as this study showed that characteristics of effective practice were visible in classes that had approximately 25 learners.

#### **6.4.2. Teaching and Classroom Management Strategies**

This study established that although teachers voiced beliefs that advocated child-centred teaching strategies, not all teachers implemented this belief in practice. The qualified ECE educator was most consistent with her beliefs as she was competent in using Vygotsky's social-cultural approach in her teaching strategies. She used an eclectic approach, combining a multitude of strategies to engage her learners in keeping with her belief that learning must be fun, relevant, engaging and motivating. This teacher was the only participant in the study who was able to use play effectively as this practice was consistent with her beliefs. The other two teachers in the study lacked skill and insight in how to implement and construct play to enable meaningful learning. This research highlighted that teachers are sometimes technical deliverers of the curriculum and change their practice to match the beliefs of their principals. This study clearly demonstrated that if a teacher does not believe in an approach his/her implementation will not be very effective. Data from classroom observations showed that a teacher who did not believe in play was forced to do so hence her implementation lacked skill on how to use play effectively to scaffold children's learning and build on their experiences. One teacher in the study believed that play was an important approach to learning but in practice used a formal teacher directed approach with heavy emphasis on the use of worksheets, workbooks and the chalkboard. She cited pressure from parents and principal, lack of resources and the lack of space as reasons for the lack of implementation of play. In addition a significant inconsistency between practice and beliefs prevailed with regard to catering for diversity and multiculturalism. Opportunities to cater for learners who were not coping were missed by some teachers in the study. None of the teachers used songs, games and greeting from other cultures which was inconsistent with their beliefs that children should feel valued and respected in their classrooms. Generally, all three teachers in the study

had effective classroom management skills that matched their beliefs on positive reinforcement.

Findings in this study illuminate the need for more training for Grade R educators in creating the conditions for learning through play and in the use of collaborative play approaches, and in guidance on scaffolding children's learning. It also highlights the need to develop teachers to use context appropriate approaches to teaching in order to cater for the diversity that exist in classrooms. Woodhead (2006) offers an alternative teaching strategy which is termed, "Contextually Appropriate Practice" (CAP), in which early childhood policies, services, curricula and practices must accommodate the circumstances of children's lives. Materials, lesson ideas and cultural resources must be made available to teachers that include songs, games, and stories from other cultures in order to equip teachers in catering for diversity in the classroom.

#### **6.4.3 Planning, Curriculum and Professional Development**

Teachers in the study believed that planning was important and were compliant with department regulations on planning according to a Grade R schedule. However, significant differences existed in how teachers regarded the curriculum documents that govern their practices. Some teachers and principals believed that the curriculum did not meet the needs of children and, therefore, did not implement the entire curriculum in practice but instead adopted it superficially while they still used the old LTA curriculum as their primary guideline. The one teacher who did implement the NCS and the FFL lacked understanding on how to plan according to the Grade R schedule. The teacher valued the scripted lessons that were created by the Education Department but application of this was done in a formal, teacher directed approach with limited interaction with learners. This study shows that teachers' lack of understanding of the recommended Grade R curriculum has led to it being implemented differently in different settings. The teachers in this study experienced tension between the traditional ECE pedagogy and the pressure to implement an official curriculum. This may suggest that Grade R teachers and principals need assistance in implementing the official curriculum in a way that will make them feel confident that they are catering for the children's needs. The Department of Education needs to co-ordinate supervised



implementation of the curriculum to ensure that teachers implement it in a developmental and culturally responsive way.

All teachers in the study were focused on completing skills in the curriculum and the concept of an emergent curriculum that takes into account the individual needs, ideas and values of the children were lacking. This finding is echoed by Woodhead (2006, p. 5) who noted that the dominant developmental paradigm, expressed within policy statements about “developmentally appropriate practices” is problematic since it shows little resemblance to the realities of the lives of many children. A major intervention is needed by policy makers, Education Departments, universities and teacher colleges as well as schools to address this challenge. Resources with poems, stories, rhymes and games from various cultures need to be developed and made available to schools. The absence of an educational programme geared pointedly towards multicultural education in the South African context, is of great concern. The official curriculum needs to be revisited to cater for the multi-cultural and diverse nature of a South African classroom. A curriculum unique to South Africa and its rainbow nation should be devised. Lessons from the Te Whariki curriculum in New Zealand need to be learned as it challenges teachers to adjust their teaching style to ensure that children’s and parents’ aspirations are recognised. Policy makers need to devise a curriculum that addresses and uses the diversity prevalent in our classes to enhance teaching and learning which in turn will help create confident learners who are valued and in turn will respect each other.

Teachers in the study echoed the belief that professional development is vital but the Education Department lacks the capacity to co-ordinate this. Lack of curriculum support, poor distribution of materials, circulars and the absence of development workshops were cited with regard to the Education Department. Teachers need support in the form of professional development in order to allow a creative and productive environment to flourish (Craft, 2002). Professional development opportunities should therefore be tailor-made for Grade R teachers to cater for the unique play pedagogy that is needed in this particular Grade. Such programmes should deepen teachers’ pedagogical knowledge, and strengthen and support their instructional practice. Professional development providers need to introduce Grade R teachers to workable alternatives to workbooks and worksheets that support the pedagogy of learning through play. The lack of capacity from Education Department on how

to guide teachers to implement the Grade R curriculum effectively suggests that departmental supervisors and officials need training themselves on how to provide meaningful support to Grade R teachers.

#### **6.4.4 Assessment**

The teachers in the study used different approaches to assessment and believed that it was vital to assess learners holistically. However, one teacher in the study did not practice this belief as her approach to assessment was mainly through the use of formal written worksheets. Parental pressure and the need to show evidence of learning was cited as the reason for this change in practice. Two teachers in the study, however, were consistent with their beliefs and used a target assessment approach where specific learners were targeted for observation for the day. All the teachers in the study believed in the need for assessment to help them reflect on their teaching. Findings in this study highlight the need to streamline the approach to assessment in Grade R as each school is doing the same action differently. Teachers need to be trained on how to manage assessment effectively, especially in large classes as the need to assess learners holistically proved to be challenging in such classes.

#### **6.4.5 Parental Involvement**

All the teachers in the study believed that parental involvement was vital and that the lack of parental support hindered learning. One teacher believed that too much of parental support can also have a negative impact as these parents are not giving their children an opportunity to become independent. The teachers in this study mention that parents play a major role in fundraising efforts and assist with the provision of resources. Parental pressure, however, was cited as major problem as parents lack an understanding of what Grade R pedagogy entails. Some teachers in the study often educated parents about the play approach to teaching and explained the need to incorporate play to enable the holistic development of children. However, one teacher in the study allowed parental pressure to dictate her practice resulting in her usage of numerous worksheets and the FFL workbook as evidence of learning. This research study highlights the need for the Education Department and department officials to educate parents through various mediums such as television, radio, newspaper and magazine articles explaining the nature of pedagogy in Grade R.

### **6.5 Additional Recommendations for Improvement in Grade R Teacher Practices**

There is a need to have competent Grade R field supervisors, in every District office to ensure quality control, as part of quality assurance for Grade R. This will help strengthen the running of Grade R classes.

In addition, Grade R teacher advisory centres must be set up in all districts. These centres must be a hub for learning for Grade R teachers with internet access, journals, lesson guidelines, newsletters pertaining to ideas for effective Grade R practice. Regular updated creative ideas must be drafted by these centres and circulated to teachers in their circuit. The availability of such centres will motivate teachers to become lifelong learners. In addition, these centres could serve as a resource bank where teachers can borrow and share resources. Videos and DVD's with model lessons and teaching ideas should be made available in these advisory centres.

Teachers are often too busy teaching and little or no time is spent on 'learning' to challenge their beliefs and practices. Teachers must be provided with opportunities for self-reflection to help with improvement in practice, through well planned quality workshops, observing other teachers and classrooms, engaging in peer coaching and mentoring. The Education Department often have its own advisors conducting workshops which have proved to be unsuccessful as these advisors are not in the classrooms and lack insight on how to advise Grade R teachers. Competent and highly effective teachers who are skilled in using play as a teaching approach should be 'head hunted' to conduct these workshops.

The training and qualifications of Grade R teachers need urgent attention. This study showed that well qualified teachers with an ECE degree proved to be more successful in the classroom. If we want quality in our classrooms we have to make sure the most important resources, namely the teacher, is well equipped. Moreover, a uniform curriculum for Grade R teacher training across all institutions should to be considered. These institutions must practically teach prospective teachers how to facilitate play to ensure that all teachers are similarly qualified to teach Grade R.

The Education Department must consider offering better salaries in order to recruit highly educated teachers and provide funding for upgrading the qualifications of those lesser qualified.

There is a need to harmonise shared expectations between Grade R teachers, their principals and Grade 1-3 teachers through workshops where all stakeholders can have a common platform to discuss concerns and to clarify curriculum issues. This will ensure continuity of curriculum between Grade R, the school leadership and the rest of the Foundation Phase.

The concept of networking can be expanded by officially pairing or clustering schools together. The more resourced schools should be paired with lesser resourced schools to enable sharing of resources, skills and knowledge. Most highly resourced schools have qualified Grade R teachers who are a valuable resource and their capacity should be utilised and shared to improve curriculum implementation. In addition model lessons can be shared in other schools must be shared through teacher network groups.

## **6.6 Future Research**

This study has served to initiate the process of gathering information about teacher beliefs and practices in Grade R classes within a context of what constitutes as effective pedagogy and highlighted how it affected the learning experiences of children. However, this study was limited to three schools which limit the validity of the findings. Extending the research in to other contexts, namely township and rural schools in Kwa-Zulu Natal will broaden the study and yield more insights into beliefs and practices in a wider area in KZN.

A significant inconsistency in beliefs and practice was related to the provision of multiculturalism and diversity. Teacher beliefs tell only half the story (Kane, Sandretto & Heath, 2002) since effective practice also depend on teacher knowledge of the curriculum subject matter and appropriate teaching skills. Teachers in the study lacked knowledge on how to implement inclusive education. Thus the question of whether teachers have a sufficiently deep level of knowledge that a constructivist and inclusive curriculum requires needs to be investigated further to ensure that education in South Africa caters for the needs of all learners.

This study highlights the inability of some teachers to implement play as a teaching strategy as some teachers lack insight on how to plan for play. This clearly highlights that there is a need for further research into play and its relationship to learning in order to underpin a more secure pedagogy of play. Much of the literature and research that exists are from an international context. Research on play embedded in a South African context will yield valuable insights on the needs and abilities of teachers in South Africa.

One School in the study mentioned the novel implementation of a focussed language ring to develop learners' language skills. Additional research on its impact on teaching and learning will guide our efforts towards improving education in Grade R.

A participant in the study mentioned the use of 'persona dolls' that will be implemented in their school to embrace the need to include diversity and multiculturalism in their school. Research on its use and its impact on teaching and learning will yield valuable insights as the road to embracing multiculturalism in South African classes is still unclear and needs added research in the quest to find some direction.

## **6.7 Conclusion**

This study focused on the exploration of teacher beliefs and practices since the role of the teacher in facilitating learning within classrooms environments is critical in ECE. In concluding this study, three comments related to the purpose of this research are made. Firstly, this study provided an opportunity to illuminate Grade R teachers' beliefs about learning and teaching by examining their practice. This process presented the realities of three teachers. The three case studies highlighted the challenges and rewards they face when working with young children. Their participation in the research afforded them with opportunities to reflect on their thinking and action. Secondly, the research identified factors that impacted on teachers' beliefs and the enactment of these beliefs in everyday classroom practice. Many challenges such as large classes, lack of support from the Education Department, parental pressure and inadequate space and resources were highlighted that impacted negatively on teachers beliefs.

The research also highlighted factors that support Grade R teachers' ability to teach. Most significant of these was the access to professional development that was prevalent in some schools internally. Finally, the research highlighted some current practice related to pedagogy in Grade R settings. What became evident in this research were both the differences and similarities of pedagogical practices of the three case studies and the reasons for this. A significant conclusion of this research is that much needs to be done by teachers, schools, department officials and policy makers to develop approaches that ensure that learners cultures are valued and highlighted in the classroom through songs, rhymes, games and stories from indigenous cultures. Too much emphasis is placed on developmentally appropriate practices which are important but this should not marginalise the social contexts and individual needs of learners which need to be valued, discussed and built upon. I personally will be seeking guidance from friends, parents and other available resources to create a handbook for the teachers in my school with songs poems, stories, folk tales and rhymes from other cultures which will be used with curriculum in 2012. This study was a personal quest towards understanding teacher beliefs and practices in Grade R as my school is opening two Grade R classes in 2012. It has served to broaden my knowledge and strengthen my understanding of effective practice.

I conclude with a poem by Loris Malaguzzi (in Gandini, 1998, p. 3) the founder of the Reggio Emilia Approach to define the paradoxes of teaching and to describe how challenging teaching young children can be. This poem shows how important it is for educators to respect children in their own right as they bring much diversity into the classroom.

### **The Hundred Languages of Childhood**

The child  
is made of one hundred.  
The child has  
A hundred languages  
A hundred hands  
A hundred thoughts  
A hundred ways of thinking  
Of playing, of speaking.  
A hundred always a hundred  
Ways of listening of marvelling of loving  
A hundred joys  
For singing and understanding  
A hundred worlds  
To discover  
A hundred worlds

To invent  
A hundred worlds  
To dream  
The child has  
A hundred languages  
(and a hundred hundred hundred more)  
But they steal ninety-nine.  
The school and the culture  
Separate the head from the body.  
They tell the child;  
To think without hands  
To do without head  
To listen and not to speak  
To understand without joy  
To love and to marvel  
Only at Easter and Christmas  
They tell the child:  
To discover the world already there  
And of the hundred  
They steal ninety-nine.  
They tell the child:  
That work and play  
Reality and fantasy  
Science and imagination  
Sky and earth  
Reason and dream  
Are things  
That do not belong together  
And thus they tell the child  
That the hundred is not there  
The child says: NO WAY the hundred is there

## REFERENCES

- Ackerman, D. J. (2006). The costs of being a child care teacher: Revisiting the problem of low wages. *Educational Policy*, 20(1), 85-112.
- Action Alliance for Children. (2007). *Play in the Early Years: Key to School Success. A Policy Brief*. Oakland, CA: Early Childhood Funders.
- Ashiabi, G. S. (2007). Play in the pre-school classroom: It's socio-emotional significance and the teacher's role in play. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 35(2), 199-207.
- Aubrey, C. (1997). *Mathematics teaching in the early years: An investigation of teachers' subject knowledge*. London: Routledge.
- Aubrey, C., David, T., Godfrey, R., & Thompson, L. (2000). *Early childhood education research*. London: Routledge.
- Bailey, B. (2000). The impact of mandated change on teachers. In N. Bascia & A. Hargreaves (Eds.), *The sharp edge of educational change: teaching, leading and the realities of reform*. London: Routledge.
- Ball, D. L. (1996). Teacher learning and the mathematics reforms: What we think we know and what we need to learn. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 77, 500-508.
- Ball, D. L. (2000). Bridging practices: Intertwining content and pedagogy in teaching and learning to teach. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 51(3), 241-247.
- Barnes, E., & Lehr, R. (2005). Including everyone: A model pre-school program for typical and special needs children, in J. L. Roopnarine & J.E. Johnson (Eds.), *Approaches to early childhood education*. New Jersey: Merrill Prentice Hall
- Bascia, N., & Hargreaves, A. (Eds.). (2000). *Teaching and leading on the sharp edge of change*. London: Routledge.
- Bauer, N. W., & Gaskell, G. (2003). *Qualitative researching with text, image and sound*. London: SAGE.
- Bennett, N., & Kell, J. (1989). *A good start: Four year olds in infant schools*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell
- Bennett, N., Wood, E., & Rogers, S. (1997). *Teaching through play: Teachers' thinking and classroom practice*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- BERA Early Years Special Interest Group (BERA-SIG). (2003). *Early years research: Pedagogy, curriculum and adult roles, training and professionalism*. Macclesfield, Cheshire: British Educational Research Association.
- Berg, B. L. (2001). *Qualitative research methods for the social sciences*. Needham Heights, Massachusetts: Allyn & Bacon.



Bergen, D. (2002). The role of pretend play in children's cognitive development. *Early childhood research and practice (ECRP)*, 4(1). Retrieved on June, 16, 2011, from: <http://ecrp.uiuc.edu/v4n1/bergen.html>

Berk, L. E., & Winsler, A. (1995). *Scaffolding children's learning: Vygotsky and early childhood education*. Washington: National Association for the Education of Young Children.

Beswick, K., Swabey, K., & Andrew, R. (2008). Looking for attributes of powerful teaching for numeracy in Tasmanian K-7 classrooms. *Mathematics Education Research Journal*, 20 (1), 3-31.

Biersteker, L., & Vale, L. (2003). Serving the most vulnerable. *Children First*, Special Issue: Reviewing the Status of Children, 10-15.

Biersteker, L. (2007). Early childhood development: *Rapid assessment and analysis of innovative community and home-based childminding and ECD programmes in support of poor and vulnerable babies and young children in South Africa*. Pretoria: UNICEF.

Biersteker, L. (2010). *Scaling-Up Early Child Development in South Africa*. Working Paper 17, April 2010. Brookings: Wolfensohn Centre for Development.

Bloch, G. (2009). *The toxic mix. What's wrong with South Africa schools and how to fix it*. Cape Town: Tafelberg.

Bodrova, E., & Leong, D. J. (1996). "Scaffolding Children's Learning in the Zone of Proximal Development." *Primary Voice*, 15, 3-5.

Bodrova, E., & Leong, D. J. (2001). *Tools of the Mind: A Case Study of Implementing the Vygotskian Approach in American Early Childhood and Primary Classrooms*. Switzerland: International Bureau of Education, UNESCO.

Bodrova, E., & Leong, D.J. (2003). "Learning and development of pre-school children: The Vygotskian perspective." In B. Gindis, B. A. Kozulin, V. Ageyev, & S. Miller, (Eds.), *Vygotsky's theory of education in cultural context*. England: Cambridge University

Bogdan, R., & Biklen, S. (2007). *Qualitative research in education: An introduction to theories and methods* (5<sup>th</sup> ed.). Boston: Allyn & Bacon.

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3, 77-101.

Broadhead, P. (2001). Investigating sociability and cooperation in four and five year olds in reception class settings. *International Journal of Early Years Education*, 9(1), 23-35.

Brousseau, B. A., Book, C., & Byers, J. L. (1988). Teacher beliefs and the cultures of teaching. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 39(6), 33-39.

Brownlee, J., & Berthelsen, D. (2006). Personal epistemology and relational pedagogy in early childhood teacher education programmes. *Early Years*, 26(1), 17-29.

Bryman, A. (2001). *Social Research Methods*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Bulkeley, J., & Fabian, H. (2006). Well-being and belonging during early educational transitions. *International Journal of Transitions in Childhood*, 2, 18-31.

Burkhardt, H., Fraser, R., & Ridgway, J. (1990). The dynamics of curriculum change. In I. Wirszup & R. Streit (Eds.), *Development in school mathematics education around the world*. Reston, VA: NCTM.

Buzeika, A. (1996). Teachers' beliefs and practice: The chicken or the egg? In P. C. Clarkson (Ed.), *Technology in mathematics education. Proceedings of the 19th Annual Conference of the Mathematics Education Research Group*. Melbourne: Mathematics Education Research Group of Australasia.

Cavoukian, R., & Sharna, O. (Eds.). (2006). *Child honoring: How to turn this world around*. Westport: Praeger.

Chaiklin, S. (2003). The zone of proximal development in vygotsky's analysis of learning and instruction. In A. Kozulin, B. Gindis, V. S. Ageyev & S. M. Miller (Eds.), *Vygotsky's educational theory in cultural context*. England: Cambridge University Press.

Chapuis, L. (2003). *Learning objects*. Canberra: ACT Department of Education and Training.

Clark, C. M., & Peterson, P. L. (1986). Teachers' thought processes. In Wittrock, M. C. (Ed.), *Handbook of research on teaching*. New York: Macmillan.

Cohen, L., Manion, L., & Morrison, K. (2000). *Research methods for education* (5<sup>th</sup> ed.). London: Routledge.

Cohen, L., Manion, L., & Morrison, K. (2007). *Research methods in education* (6<sup>th</sup> ed.). London: Routledge.

Cotton, K. (1989). Parent involvement in education. *School Improvement Research Series*. [Online]. Retrieved on May, 20, 2011 from: [teacherweb.com/TX/.../Kirby/ParentInvolvementinEducation.doc](http://teacherweb.com/TX/.../Kirby/ParentInvolvementinEducation.doc)

Craft, A. (2002). *Creativity and early years education. A lifewide foundation*. London: Continuum.

Craft, A. (2005). *Creativity in schools: Tensions and dilemmas*. Oxford: Routledge.

Creswell, J. W. (2002). *Educational Research: Planning, conducting, and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Merrill Prentice Hall.

Creswell, J. W. (2003). *Research design. Qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods approaches*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage

Creswell, J. W. (2007). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing from among the 5 Approaches* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). London: Sage

Davin, R., & Van Staden, C. (2005). *The reception year: Learning through play*. Sandton: Heinemann.

De Vos, A.S. (2002). Qualitative data analysis and interpretation. In: Lewis, A. 2003. *The management of childhood stress: a psycho-educational perspective*. Stellenbosch: University of Stellenbosch.

Denscombe, M. (2007). *The good research guide for small-scale social research projects* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). Maidenhead, Berkshire: Open University Press.

Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. (2000). Introduction: The discipline and practice of qualitative research. In N.K. Denzin & Y. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR). (2009). *Belonging, being & becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia*. Canberra: DEEWR.

Department of Education (DoE ). (1995). *White Paper on Education and Training*. Pretoria: DoE. Retrieved on April 20, 2010, from:  
[http://www.polity.org.za/polity/govdocs/white\\_papers/educ1.html](http://www.polity.org.za/polity/govdocs/white_papers/educ1.html)

Department of Education (DoE ). (1996). *Interim Early Childhood Development Policy*. Pretoria: DoE. Retrieved on April 22, 2010, from:  
<http://www.polity.org.za/article/interim-policy-for-early-childhood-development>

Department of Education (DoE ). (1997). *Illustrative Learning Programme for Grade R (Reception) Year*. Pretoria: DoE.

Department of Education (DoE ). (2001a). *The nationwide audit of ECD Provisioning in South Africa*. Pretoria: DoE.

Department of Education (DoE ). (2001b). *Report on the National ECD Pilot Project*, May 2001. Pretoria: DoE. Retrieved on April 20, 2010, from:  
[http://www.capegateway.gov.za/Text/.../national\\_report\\_ecd\\_pilot\\_2001.pdf](http://www.capegateway.gov.za/Text/.../national_report_ecd_pilot_2001.pdf)

Department of Education (DoE ). (2001c). *Education White Paper 5 on Early Childhood Education-Meeting the challenge of early childhood development in South Africa*. Pretoria: DoE. Retrieved on April 20, 2010, from:  
[http://www.polity.org.za/polity/govdocs/white\\_papers/education.html](http://www.polity.org.za/polity/govdocs/white_papers/education.html)

Department of Education (DoE). (2001d). *Draft Revised National Curriculum Statement for grades R-9(Schools)*. Gazette No: 22559. Pretoria: DoE.

Department of Education (DoE). (2003). *Revised National Curriculum Statement for grades R-9(Schools): Teachers Guide for development of learning programmes*. Pretoria: DoE

Department of Education (DoE). (2008). *Foundations for Learning Campaign 2008-2011*. Government Gazette No: 30880. Pretoria: DoE.

Department of Basic Education (DBE). (2010). *Education for all 2009 Country report: South Africa*. Pretoria: DBE

Department of Basic Education (DBE). (2011a). *Report on the Annual National Assessments*. Pretoria: DBE. Retrieved on July 30, 2011, from: [www.education.gov.za/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket...tabid=358](http://www.education.gov.za/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket...tabid=358)

Department of Basic Education (DBE). (2011b). *Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement Grades R-3 English Home language*. Pretoria: DBE.

Der Spiegel. (1977). *German News Magazine*, 20, 89-90.

Dockett, S., Perry, B., Campbell, H., Hard, L., Kearney, E., Taffe, R. (2007). *Early Years Learning and Curriculum. Reconceptualising Reception: Continuity of learning*. South Australia: Department of Education and Children's Services.

Dolya, G., & Palmer, S. (2004). *Lev Vygotsky*. TES Forum [online] Retrieved on May 20, 2010, from: [www.suepalmer.co.uk/articles/LEV%20VYGOTSKY.pdf](http://www.suepalmer.co.uk/articles/LEV%20VYGOTSKY.pdf)

Doolittle, P. E. (1999). Constructivism and online education. [On-line]. Retrieved on May 31, 2011 from: <http://edpsychserver.ed.vt.edu/workshops/tohe1999/text/doo2.doc>

Drake, J. (2001). *Planning children's play and Learning in the Foundation Stage*. London: David Fulton Publishers Ltd.

Duncan, R. M., & Tarulli, D. (2003). Play as the leading activity of the pre-school period: Insights from Vygotsky, Leontiev, and Bakhtin. *Early Education and Development*, 14, 271-292.

Early Years Foundation Stage Statutory Framework. (2008). *Setting the Standards for Learning, Development and Care for children from birth to five*. England : Department of Children Schools and Families (DCSF).

Eastern Cape Department of Education. (2010). *The state of ECD Provincially – Status and Practice*. Eastern Cape: Eastern Cape Department of Education.

Ebrahim, H. B. (2010). Tracing historical shifts in early care and education in South Africa. *Journal of Education*, 48, 1-16.

Education Department of Western Australia. (1994). *First Steps Developmental Continua: Reading, Writing, spelling, Oral Language*. Melbourne: Longman.

- Edwards, C., Gandini, L., & Forman, G. (Eds.). (1993). *The hundred languages of children: The Reggio Emilia approach to early childhood education*. Norwood, NJ: Ablex.
- Edwards, S., & Kuhlman, W. (2007). Culturally Responsive Teaching: Do We Walk Our Talk? *Multicultural Education*, July 2007, 45-49
- Elkind, D. (1993). *Images of the young child: Collected essays on childhood and education*. Washington, DC: National Association for the Education of Young Children.
- Elkind, D. (2003). Thanks for the memory: The lasting values of true play. *Young Children*, 58(3), 46-50.
- Elkind, D. (2007). *The power of play: How spontaneous, imaginative activities lead to happier, healthier children*. Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press.
- Elmore, R. F., & Burney, D. (1997). *Investing in teacher learning: Staff development and instructional improvement in community school district #2, New York City*. New York: National Commission on Teaching and America's Future.
- Esbensen, S. (1987). *An Outdoor Classroom*. Ypsilanti, MI: High/Scope Press.
- Evertson, C. M., & Weinstein, C. S. (2006). Classroom management as a field of inquiry. In C. M.
- Evertson & C. S. Weinstein (Eds.), *Handbook of classroom management: Research, practice, and contemporary issues* (pp. 3-16). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Ezzy, D. (2002). *Qualitative analysis: Practice and innovation*. Australia: Allen & Unwin.
- Feden, P., & Vogel, R. (2006). *Education*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 187-190.
- Flanagan, C. (1999). *Applying Child Psychology to Early Child Development*. Cheltenham: Nelson Thornes Limited
- Fleer, M. (2010). *Early learning and development: Cultural historical concepts in play*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Foote, L., Smith, J., & Ellis, F. (2004). The impact of teachers' beliefs on the literacy experiences of young children: A New Zealand perspective. *Early Years*, 24(2), 135-147.
- Frame, J. (2003). Theorising curriculum. In Coleman, M., Graham-Jolley, M., & Middlewood, D. (Eds.), *Managing the curriculum in South African schools*. London: The Commonwealth Secretariat.
- Fullan, M., & Stiegelbaure, S. (1991). *The new meaning of educational change*. New York: Cassell.

- Fullan, M. (1993). *Change forces: Probing the depths of educational reform*. London: Routledge
- Fullan, M., & Hargreaves, A. (1996). *What's Worth Fighting for in Your School?* New York: Teachers' College Press.
- Galloway, C. A. (2001). Vygotsky's learning theory. In M. Orey (Ed.), *Emerging perspectives on learning, teaching, and technology*. [online] Retrieved on May28, 2010 from: <http://itstudio.coe.uga.edu/ebook/vygotskyconstructionism.htm>
- Gandini, L. (1998). Educational and caring spaces. In C. Edwards, L. Gandini, & G. Forman, (Eds.), *The hundred languages of children: The Reggio Emilia approach to early childhood education - Advanced Reflections*, 161-178. Norwood, NJ: Ablex.
- Gauvain, M. (2001). *The social context of cognitive development*. New York: Guilford Press.
- Gestwicki, C. (2007). *Developmentally appropriate practice: Curriculum development in early childhood education*. New York: Thomson Delmar Learning.
- Glatthorn, A., & Joyner, R. (2005). *Writing the Winning Thesis or Dissertation: A Step by-Step Guide*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press Inc.
- Goldfarb, M. E. (2001). *The educational theory of Lev Semenovich Vygotsky (1896 - 1934)*. New Foundations. Retrieved on August 15, 2011, from: [www.newfoundations.com/GALLERY/Vygotsky.html](http://www.newfoundations.com/GALLERY/Vygotsky.html)
- Goldstein, L.S. (2007). Embracing multiplicity: learning from two practitioners pedagogical responses to the changing demands of kindergarten teaching in the United States. *Journal of Research in Childhood Education*, 21(4), 378-399.
- Gordon, A. M., & Browne, K. W. (2000). *Beginning and Beyond* (5<sup>th</sup> ed.). New York: Delmar Thomson Learning
- Gredler, M., & Shields, C. (2004). Does No One Read Vygotsky's Words? Commentary on Glassman. *Educational Researcher*, 33 (2), 21-25.
- Grobbelaar, R. (2011). *Literacy levels plunge*. KwaZulu Natal: Timeslive Retrieved on August 10, 2011, from: <http://www.timeslive.co.za/thetimes/2011/06/28/literacy-levels-plunge>
- Handal, B., & Herrington, A. (2003). Mathematics teachers' beliefs and curriculum reform. *Mathematics Education Research Journal*, 15(1), 59-69.
- Hargreaves, A. (2005). *The emotions of teaching and educational change*. Netherlands: Springer.
- Harris, V. (1996). "Open Air Learning Experiences" in "Supporting Young Learners 2". Ypsilanti, Michigan: High Scope Educational Research Foundation

Hatch, J. A. (2002). *Doing Qualitative research in educational settings*. United States of America: State University of New York Press.

Hattie, J. A. (2003) *Teachers make a difference: What is the research evidence?* Background Paper to invited address presented at the 2003 ACER Research Conference, Melbourne, October, 19-21.

Hayes, N. (2003). Play, care and learning: Creating an integrated curriculum for early childhood education in Ireland. *Researching Early Childhood*, 5, 69-81.

Hayes, D. Mills, M. Christie, P., & Lingard, B. (2006). *Teachers and schooling making a difference: Productive pedagogies, assessment and performance*. Sydney: Allen & Unwin.

Hedges, H., & Cullen, J. (2005). Subject knowledge in early childhood curriculum and pedagogy: Beliefs and practices. *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood*, 6(1), 66-79.

High Scope Educational Research Foundation. (2001). *The physical learning environment: Participants guide*. Michigan: High Scope Educational Research Foundation.

Hirsh-Pasek, K., Golinkoff, R.M., Berk, L.E., & Singer, D.G, (2009). *A mandate for playful learning in pre-school: Presenting the evidence*. London: Oxford University Press.

Hohmann, M., & Weikart, D. (1995). *Educating young children*. USA: The High Scope Press.

Honig, A. S. (2006). What infants, toddlers, and pre-schoolers learn from play: 12 ideas. *Montessori Life*, 18(1), 16-21.

Hopkins, D. (2002). *A teacher's guide to classroom research*. Buckingham: Open University Press.

Huberman, A. M., & Miles, M. B. (1994). Data management and analysis methods. In Denzin, N. K. & Lincoln, Y. S. (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 428-455). London: SAGE.

Isenberg, J. P. (1990). Teachers' thinking and beliefs and classroom practice. *Childhood Education*, 66, 322-327.

Irwin, L., Siddiqi, A., & Hertzman, C. (2007). *Early child development: A powerful equaliser*. Vancouver: Human Early Learning Partnership.

Izumi-Taylor, S., Samuelsson, I., & Rogers, C. (2010). *Perspectives of Play in Three Nations: A Comparative Study in Japan, the United States, and Sweden*. University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign: Clearinghouse on Early Education and Parenting (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. EJ889717).

Jalongo, M.R., Fennimore, B., Pattnaik, J., Laverick, D.M., Brewster, J., & Mutuku, M. (2004). Blended perspectives: A global vision for high-quality early childhood education. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 3(3), 143-155.

Jambunathan, S., & Caulfield, M. (2006). Developmentally appropriate practices in Asian Indian childhood classrooms. *Early child development and care*, 178(3), 251-258.

Jansen, J. D. (1998). Curriculum reform in South Africa: A critical analysis of outcomes-based education. *Cambridge Journal of Education*, 28(3), 321-331.

Jansen, J. D. (2003). On the politics of policy: State and curriculum after Apartheid. In Coleman, M., Graham-Jolley, M. & Middlewood, D. (Eds.), *Managing the curriculum in South African schools*, 35-47. London: The Commonwealth Secretariat.

Jarvis, M., & Chandler, E. (2001). *Angles on Psychology*. Cheltenham: Nelson Thornes Limited.

Jenkinson, J., Hyde, T., & Ahmad, S. (2002), *Occupational Therapy Approaches for Secondary Special Needs*. London: Whurr.

Johnson, B., & Christensen, L. (2004). *Educational Research: Quantitative, Qualitative and Mixed Approaches* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Boston: Pearson Education.

Johansson, E., & Pramling-Samuelsson, I. (2006). Lek och läroplan: Möten mellan barn och lärare i förskola och skola [Play and curriculum: Encounters between children and teachers in pre-school and school]. Göteborg: Acta Universitatis Gothoburgensis.

Johansson, E., & Pramling-Samuelsson, I. (2007). Play and learning—an integrated wholeness. In Rebecca New & Moncrieff Cochran (Eds.), *Early childhood education—An international encyclopedia* 4, 1270-1273.

Jones, B. F., & Fennimore, T. F. (1990). The new definition of learning: the first step for school reform (Guidebook 1). In: *Restructuring to Promote Learning in America's Schools*. Public Broadcasting System, Alexandria, VA : North Central Regional Educational Laboratory.

Kagan, D. M. (1992). Implications of research on teacher belief. *Educational Psychologist*, 27, 65-90.

Kane, R., Sandretto, S., & Heath, C. (2002). Telling half the story: A critical review of research on teachers' beliefs and practices of University academics. *Review of Educational Research* 72(2), 177-228.

Karpov, Y., & Haywood, H. (1998). Two ways to elaborate Vygotsky's concept of mediation. *American Psychologist*, 53, 27-36.

Katz, L. (1995). *Talks with teachers of young children. A collection*. New Jersey: Ablex Publishing Corporation.



Kellaghan, T., & Greaney, V. (1992). *Using Examinations to Improve Education: A Study in Fourteen African Countries*. Washington, DC: World Bank.

Keys, C. W., & Bryan, L. A. (2001). Co-constructing inquiry-based science with teachers: Essential research for lasting reform. *Journal of Research in Science Teaching*, 38(6), 631-645.

King, P. J. (2004). *One hundred philosophers: A guide to the world's greatest thinkers*. Cape Town: Zebra Press.

Koehler, M. S., & Grouws, D. A. (1992). Mathematics teaching practices and their effects. In D. A. Grouws (Ed.), *Handbook of research in on mathematics teaching and learning*. 115-126. New York: Macmillan.

Kohn, A. (2000). *The schools our children deserve: Moving beyond traditional classrooms and "tougher standards"*. Florida: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.

Kostelnik, M. J., Soderman, A. K., & Whiren, A. P. (2004). *Developmentally appropriate Curriculum: Best practices in early childhood education* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Prentice Hall.

Krashen, D. (1988). *Second Language Acquisition and Second Language Learning*. New York: Prentice-Hall

Lara-Cinisomo, S., Fuligni, A. S., Daugherty, L., Howes, C., & Karoly, L. (2009). *A Qualitative Study of Early Childhood Educators' Beliefs about Key Classroom Experiences*. RAND Working Paper No. WR- 656. Retrieved on May 10, 2010, from: <http://ecrp.uiuc.edu/v11n1/lara.html>

Learning and teaching Scotland. (2005). *Let's Talk about Pedagogy: towards a Shared Understanding for Early Years Education in Scotland*. Glasgow: LTS. Retrieved on May 10, 2010, from: <http://www.ltsotland.org.uk/earlyyears/files/talkpedagogy.pdf>

Lee, J. S. (2006). Pre-school teachers shared beliefs about appropriate pedagogy for 4-year-olds, *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 32(6), 433-441.

Lee, J. S., & Ginsburg, H. P. (2007). What is appropriate mathematics education for four-year olds?: pre-kindergarten teachers beliefs. *Journal of Early Childhood Research*, 5(2), 1-31. Retrieved on August 12, 2011, from: <http://ecr.sagepub.com>.

Lin, H. L., Lawrence, F. R., & Gorrell, J. (2002). Kindergarten teachers views of children's readiness for school. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 18(2), 225-237.

Linington, V., & Excell, L. (2010). *Adding to excellence; putting the 'in' on to formal: High quality Grade R in the South African context*. Paper presented at the Colloquium at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. 19 May. Unpublished

- Lobman, C., & Ryan, S. (2007). Differing discourses on early childhood teacher education. *Journal of Early Childhood Teacher Education*, 28(4), 367-380.
- Lodico, M. G., Spaulding, D. T., & Voegtle, K. H. (2006). *Methods in educational research: From theory to practice*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Lovat, T. J. (2003). "The Role of the 'Teacher' coming of Age?" Australian Council Deans of Education (ACDE), Discussion Paper.
- Maccoby, E. E., & Lewis C. C. (2002). Less day care or different day care? *Child Development*, 74(4), 1069-1075.
- Malaguzzi, L. (1993) History, ideas, and basic philosophy, in Edwards, C., Gandini, L., & Forman, G. (Eds.), *The hundred languages of children-The Reggio Emilia approach to early childhood education*. Norwood, NJ: Ablex.
- Malaguzzi, L. (1996). The right to environment, in Filippini, T., & Vecchi, V. (Eds.), *The Hundred Languages of Children: The Exhibit*. Reggio Emilia: Reggio Children.
- Marcon, R.A. (1999). Differential impact of pre-school models on development and early learning of inner city children: A three-cohort study. *Developmental Psychology*, 35(2), 358 – 375.
- Marshall, C. & Rossman, G.B. (2006). *Designing Qualitative Research*. Thousand Oaks: Sage
- Martin, J. & Sugarman, J. (1993). *Models of Classroom Management* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Bellingham, Washington: Temeron Books Inc.
- Marzano, R, Marzano, J., & Pickering, D. (2003). *Classroom management that works. Research-based strategies for every teacher*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development
- Mathison, S. (1988). Why triangulate? *Educational Researcher*, 17(2), 13-17.
- McKinsey & Company (2007). *The World's Best Performing School Systems Come Out on Top*. London: McKinsey and Co. Retrieved on September 12, 2011, from: [http://www.mckinsey.com/clientservice/socialsector/resources/pdf/Worlds\\_School\\_Systems\\_Final.pdf](http://www.mckinsey.com/clientservice/socialsector/resources/pdf/Worlds_School_Systems_Final.pdf)
- McLaughlin, M. W. (1987). Learning for experience: Lessons from policy implementation. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 9(2), 171-178.
- McNiff, J. (1998). *Action Research Principles and Practice*. London: Macmillan educational books.
- Merriam, S. B. (1998). *Qualitative research and case study applications in education*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

- Mertens, D. M. (1998). *Research Methods in Education and Psychology: Integrating Diversity*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Miller, P. H. (2002). *Theories of developmental psychology* (4<sup>th</sup> ed.). New York: Worth Publishers.
- Miller, D. (2008). Teaching strategies in N. J. Salkind & R. Rasmussen (Eds.), *Encyclopaedia of educational psychology*, 2, 62-965, Los Angeles: Sage.
- Ministry of Education. (1996). *Te Whāriki: Early childhood curriculum. He Whāriki Matauranga mo nga Mokopuna o Aotearoa*. Wellington: Learning Media.  
Retrieved on June 16, 2011, from: [http://www.dji.de/bibs/320\\_whariki.pdf](http://www.dji.de/bibs/320_whariki.pdf)
- Moon, B., & Leach, J. (2008). *The power of pedagogy*. London: Sage.
- Mortimore, P. (Ed). (1999). *Understanding pedagogy and its impact on learning*. London: Paul Chapman Publishing.
- Mouton, J. (2001). *How to succeed in your master's and doctoral studies: A South African guide and resource book*. Pretoria: Van Schaik Publishers.
- Moyles J., Adams S., & Musgrove A. (2002). *(SPEEL) Study of Pedagogical Effectiveness in Early Learning*. DfES Research Report 363. London: Department for Education and Skills.  
Retrieved on May 15, 2010, from: [www.dfes.gov.uk/research/data/uploadfiles/RR363.pdf](http://www.dfes.gov.uk/research/data/uploadfiles/RR363.pdf)
- Moyles, J. (Ed.). (2005). *The excellence of play* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Maidenhead: OU Press.
- National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA). (2004). *Towards a Framework for Early Learning*. Dublin: National Council for Curriculum and Assessment.
- National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). (1991). *Accreditation Criteria and Procedures*. Washington DC: NAEYC.
- National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). (1997). *Developmentally appropriate practice in early childhood programs serving children from birth through age 8. Position statement*. Washington DC: NAEYC.
- National Education Policy Investigation (NEPI). (1992). *Early childhood educare : report of the Educare Research Group*. Cape Town: Oxford University Press.
- National Treasury of Republic of South Africa, Technical Assistance Unit (TAU). (2008). *ECD Grade R diagnostic Project: Consolidated Report and Recommendations*. Pretoria: National Treasury.
- Nespor, J. (1987). The role of beliefs in the practice of teaching. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 19(4), 317–328.
- Newby, P. (2010). *Research Methods for Education*. Harlow: Pearson Education Ltd.

- Nieuwenhuis, J. (2007). Qualitative Research Designing and Data Gathering Techniques. In K. Maree (Ed.), *First Steps in Research* (pp. 70-97), Pretoria: Van Schaik.
- Nutbrown, C. (2006). *Threads of Thinking: Young Children Learning and the Role of Early Education* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed). London: Paul Chapman Publishing.
- O'Donoghue, T., Punch K. (2003). *Qualitative Educational Research in Action: Doing and Reflecting*. London: Routledge.
- Olsen, A. E., & Sumsion, J. (2000). *Early Childhood Teacher practices regarding the use of dramatic play in K-2 classrooms*. Paper presented at the Annual Conference of the Australian Association for Research in Education, December 4-7, Sydney, Australia
- Oppenheim, A. N. (1996). *Questionnaire design, interviewing and attitude measurement*. London: Pinter Publishers.
- Ouvry, M. (2003). *Exercising muscles and minds*, London: National Children's Bureau
- Padayachee, R., Atmore, E., Biersteker, L., & Evans, J. (1994). *Report of the South African Study on Early Childhood Development: Recommendations for Action in Support of Young Children*. Washington DC: World Bank, Centre for Education Policy Development.
- Pajares, M. F. (1992). Teachers beliefs and educational research: Cleaning up a messy construct. *Review of Educational Research*, 62, 307-332.
- Paley, V. (1986). "On Listening to What the Children Say." *Harvard Educational Review*, 122-31.
- Parker, A., & Neuharth-Pritchett, S. (2006). Developmentally appropriate practice in Kindergarten: factors shaping beliefs and practice, *Journal of Research in Childhood Education*, 21(1), 65-78.
- Pasley, J. D. (2002). *The role of instructional materials in professional development: Lessons learned from the LCS community*. Chapel Hill, NC: Horizon Research. Retrieved on July 20, 2011, from: <http://www.horizonresearch.com/LSC/news/pasley2002.php>.
- Patterson, G. R. (1975). *Families: application of social learning to family life*. Champaign, Illinois: Research Press.
- Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). Thousand Oaks, California: Sage.
- Pellegrini, A. D. (1980). The relationship between kindergartners' play and achievement in prereading, language, and writing. *Psychology in the Schools*, 17(4), 530-535.
- Pellegrini, A., Dupuis, D., & Smith, P. (2007) 'Play in evolution and development.' *Developmental Review*, 27(2), 261 - 276.

Pence, A. R., & Marfo, K. (2008). Early childhood development in Africa: Interrogating constraints of prevailing knowledge bases. *International Journal of Psychology*, 43(2), 78 - 87. Retrieved on September 20, 2011, from: <<http://www.informaworld.com/>>.

Penn, H. (2005). *Understanding early childhood*. Glasgow: Open University Press.

Peters, D. L., & Sutton, R. E. (1984) The effects of CDA training on the beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors of Head Start personnel. *Child Care Quarterly*, 13(4), 251–261.

Phatudi, N. C. (2007). *A study of transition from pre-school and home contexts to grade 1 in a developing country*. Unpublished PhD Thesis: University of Pretoria.

Porteus, K., Vally, S., & Ruth, T. (2001). *Alternatives to corporal punishment*. Cape Town: Heinemann.

Porteus, K. (2004). The State of Play in Early Childhood Development. In Chisholm, L. (Ed.), *Changing Class: Education and Social Change in Post-Apartheid South Africa*. Cape Town: Zed Books.

Pramling Samuelsson, I., & Asplund Carlsson, M. (2008). The playing learning child: Towards a pedagogy of early childhood. *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research*, 52(6), 623–641.

Prochner, L., & Kabiru, M. (2008). ECD in Africa: A historical perspective in M. Garcia, A. Pence & J. L. Evans (Eds.). *Africa's Future, Africa's Challenge: Early Childhood Care and Development in Sub-Saharan Africa*. 117-130. Washington DC: World Bank.

Pui-Wah, D. C. & Stimpson, P. (2004). Articulating contrasts in Kindergarten teachers' implicit knowledge on play-based learning, *International Journal of Educational Research*, 41(4 & 5), 339-352.

Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA). (2000). *Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage*. London: QCA/Dfee.

Reedy, T. (1995). *Toku Rangatiratanga na te Mana-Matauranga. 'Knowledge and Power Set Me Free...'* Paper presented at the Sixth Early Childhood Convention, Tamaki Makaurau - Auckland.

Richardson, V. (1996). The role of attitudes and beliefs in learning to teach. In: J. Sikula (Ed.), *Handbook of Research on Teacher Education* (pp. 102 – 119). New York: Macmillan.

Rieber, R. W., & Robinson, D. K. (Eds.). (2004). *The Essential Vygotsky*. New York: Kluwer Academic

Rimm-Kaufman, S. E., Storm, M. D., Sawyer, B. E., Pianta, R. C., & LaParo, K. M. (2006). The teacher belief Q-sort: A measure of teachers' priorities in relation to disciplinary practices, teaching practices, and beliefs about children. *Journal of School Psychology*, 44, 141 - 165.

- Rinaldi, C. (2006). *In dialogue with Reggio Emilia*. London: Routledge.
- Robinson, K. H., & Diaz, C. J. (2006). *Diversity and Difference in early childhood education: Issues for theory and practice*. New York: Open University Press.
- Robson, C. (2002). *Real World Research* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Oxford: Blackwell
- Rolfe, S. A. (2001). Direct Observation, in MacNaughton, G. M, Rolfe, S. A., & Siraj-Blatchford, I. (Eds.), *Doing early childhood research: International perspectives on theory and practice*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Rosenthal, M. K. (1991) Behaviors and beliefs of caregivers in family day care: the effects of background and work environment. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 6, 263–283.
- Rubin, J. H., & Rubin, I. S. (1995). *Qualitative Interviewing: The art of hearing data*. London : Sage.
- Ryan, S., & Ackerman, D. J. (2005). Using pressure and support to create a qualified workforce. *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, 13(23), 1-20.
- Saltz, E., Dixon, D., & Johnson, H. (1977). Training disadvantaged pre-schoolers on various fantasy activities: Effects on cognitive functioning and impulse control. *Child Development*, 48(2), 367-380.
- Samuel, M .L. (2010). *Grade R beyond conversations to action*. Paper presented at the Colloquium at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. 19 May. Unpublished paper.
- Sandberg, A., & Eriksson, A. (2008). Children’s participation in pre-school-on the conditions of adults: Pre-school staff concepts of children’s participation in pre-school everyday life. *Early Child Development and Care*. 1-12, Retrieved on July 12 2011, from: <http://0www.informaworld.com.innopac.up.ac.za>.
- Santrock, J. W. (2004) *Child Development* (10<sup>th</sup> ed.). Boston: McGraw-Hill.
- Schofield, V. W. (1990). Increasing the generalizability of qualitative research. In Eisner, E. W. & A. Peshkin. *Qualitative Enquiry in Education: The continuing debate*. New York: Teachers College Press
- Schumacher, S., & McMillan, J. H. (1993). *Research in education: A conceptual introduction*. New York: Harper Collins
- Schutz, R. (2002). *Vygotsky: Language and acquisition*. [On-line]. Retrieved on June, 20, 2010 from: <http://www.english.sk.com.br/sk-vygot.html>
- Schwandt, T. (2007). *Sage dictionary of qualitative inquiry* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Schweinhart, L. J., Montie, J., Xiang, Z., Barnett, W. S., Belfield, C. R., & Nores, M. (2005). *Lifetime Effects: The High/Scope Perry Pre-school Study through Age 40*. Ypsilanti, Michigan: High/Scope Press. Retrieved on August 14, 2010, from: <http://www.highscope.org/Research/PerryProject/perrymain.htm>>

Scribner, J. P. (1999). Professional development: Untangling the influence of work context on teacher learning. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 35(2), 238-266.

Seefeldt, C., & Wasik, B. A. (2006). *Early education: three-, four-, and five-year-olds go to school*. Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Pearson-Merrill-Prentice Hall.

Shambaugh, N., & Magliaro, S. (2001). A reflexive model for teaching instructional design. *ETR&D*, 49(2), 69-92.

Shiple, D. (2008). *Empowering Children. Play-based curriculum for lifelong learning*. USA: Nelson Foundation.

Silverman, D. (2005). *Doing qualitative research* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Thousand Oaks CA: Sage.

Siraj-Blatchford, I., & Sylva, K. (2002). *The Effective Pedagogy in the Early Years Project. A Confidential Report to the DfES*. London: London University Institute of Education

Siraj-Blatchford, I., Sylva, K., Muttock, S., Gilden, R., & Bell, D. (2002). *Researching effective pedagogy in the early years*. London: Department of Education and Skills. Retrieved on May 10, 2010, from: <http://www.dfes.gov.uk/research/data/uploadfiles/RR356.pdf>

Siraj-Blatchford, I., Sylva, K. and Taggart, B., Melhuish, E., Sammons, P., & Elliot, K. (2003). *Technical paper 10: intensive case studies of practice across the foundation stage*. (The Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE) project). London: DfES/Institute of Education, University of London.

Siraj-Blatchford, I., & Sylva, K. (2004), 'Researching Pedagogy in English Pre-Schools'. *British Educational Research Journal* , 30(5), 713-730

Siraj-Blatchford, I. (2009). Quality teaching in the early years. In Anning, A., Cullen, J. & Fler, M. (Eds.), *Early childhood education: Society and culture* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). 147-157. London: Sage.

Smidt, S. (2007). *A guide to early years practice*. London: Routledge.

Smidt, S. (2009). *Introducing Vygotsky: A guide for practitioners and students in early years education*. London: Routledge

Smilansky, S. (1990). Sociodramatic play: Its relevance to behavior and achievement in school. In Klugman, E., & Smilansky, S. (Eds.), *Children's play and learning*. New York: Teacher's College Press.

Smith, K., & Dutton, S. (1979). Play and training in direct and innovative problem solving. *Child Development*, 50(3), 830-83.

Smith, J. A. (2008). *Qualitative Psychology: A Practical Guide to Research Methods* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). London: Sage.

Snow-Renner, R., & Lauer, P. A. (2005). *McREL Insights professional development analysis*. Midcontinent Research for Education and Learning. Retrieved on July 28, 2011, from: [http://www.mcrel.org/PDF/Professional Development/5051IR\\_Prof\\_dvlpmt\\_analysis.pdf](http://www.mcrel.org/PDF/Professional%20Development/5051IR_Prof_dvlpmt_analysis.pdf).

South African Institute for Distance Education (SAIDE). (2010). *Grade R Research Project*. Johannesburg: SAIDE.

Stacey, S. (2009). *Emergent curriculum in early childhood settings: From theory to practice*. StPaul, MN: Redleaf Press.

Stake, R. E. (2000). Case studies. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Stephen, C. (2006). *Early years education: Perspectives from a review of the international literature*. Edinburgh: Scottish Executive Education Department. Retrieved on December 10, 2010, from: <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2006/02/06145130/0>

Stewart, N., & Pugh, R. (2007). *Early Years Vision in Focus, Part 2: Exploring Pedagogy*. Shrewsbury: Shropshire County Council.

Stipek, D., & Byler, P. (1997). Early Childhood Education Teachers: Do they Practice what they preach? *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 12(3), 305-325.

Stoffels, N. T. (2004). *Sir on what page is the answer? Exploring teacher decision-making in the context of curriculum change*. Unpublished PhD Thesis: University of Pretoria.

Sylva, K., Melhuish, E., Sammons, P., Siraj-Blatchford, I., & Taggart, B. (2004). *The Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE) Project: Technical Paper 12 - The final report*. London: DfES / Institute of Education, University of London. Retrieved on October 16, 2010, from: [www.dfes.gov.uk/research/data/uploadfiles/SSU\\_FR\\_2004\\_01.pdf](http://www.dfes.gov.uk/research/data/uploadfiles/SSU_FR_2004_01.pdf)

Sylva, K., Melhuish, E., Sammons, P., Siraj-Blatchford, I., & Taggart, B. (2009). *Final report from the primary phase: pre-school, school, and family influences on children's development during Key Stage 2 (age 7–11)*, (Effective Pre-School and Primary Education 3–11 project (EPPE 3–11)), London: DCSF/Institute of Education, University of London.

Sylva, K., & Wiltshire, J. (1993). The Impact of Early Learning on Children's Later Development. A review prepared for the RSA Inquiry "Start Right." *The European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*, 1, 17-40.



The Supreme Education Council Education Institute. (2007). *Guidelines for Health and Safety Standards in Early Years Programmes in the Independent Schools*. Oatar: Curriculum Standards Office Early Years.

Tillema, H. H., & Imants, J. G. M. (1995). Training for the professional development of teachers. In Guskey, T. & Huberman, M. (Eds.), *Professional development in education: New paradigms and practices*. 135-150. New York: Teachers College Press.

Tobin, K., & Kincheloe, J. (Eds.). (2006). *Doing educational research: A handbook*. Rotterdam: Sense Publishers.

UMALASI, CEPD & WITS Seminar. (2010). *Will Grade R Really Improve the Quality of South African Education?* Retrieved on December 12, 2010 from: <http://www.cepd.org.za/files/pictures/Final%20Reporteducation.pdf>

UNICEF. (1990). *Convention on the Rights of the Child*. New York: UNICEF. Retrieved on May 10, 2010 from: [http://www.unicef.org/voy/explore/rights/explore\\_157.html](http://www.unicef.org/voy/explore/rights/explore_157.html)

UNICEF. (2000). *Defining Quality in Education*. New York: UNICEF Retrieved on May 15, 2011, from: [www.unicef.org/education/files/QualityEducation.PDF](http://www.unicef.org/education/files/QualityEducation.PDF)

UNICEF. 2009. *South Africa: Annual Report 2009*. Pretoria: UNICEF. Retrieved on May 15, 2010 from: [http://www.unicef.org/southafrica/SAF\\_resources\\_annual2009.pdf](http://www.unicef.org/southafrica/SAF_resources_annual2009.pdf)

Vandenberg, B. (1986). Play theory. In G. Fein & M. Rivkin, (Eds.), *The young child at play*, 17-22. Washington, DC: NAEYC.

Vander Wilt, J. L., & Monroe, V. (1998). Successfully moving toward developmentally appropriate practice: It takes time and effort! *Young Children*, 53(4), 17-24.

Villegas-Reimers E. (2003). *Teacher professional development: an international review of the literature*. Paris: UNESCO International Institute for Educational Planning.

Vitto, J. M. (2003). *Relationship-Driven Classroom Management*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press Inc.

Vygotsky, L. S. (1962). *Thought and language*. Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

Vygotsky, L. S. (1966). Development of the higher mental functions. In A. Leontiev, A. Luria & A. Smirnov (Eds.), *Psychological research in the USSR*, 1, 1-46. Moscow: Progress Publishing.

Vygotsky, L. S. (1967). Play and its role in the mental development of the child. *Soviet Psychology*, 5(3), 6-18.

Vygotsky, L.S. (1978) *Mind in Society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press.

Vygotsky, L. S. (1981). The genesis of higher mental functions (J. V. Wertsch, Trans.). In J. V. Wertsch (Ed.), *The concept of activity in soviet psychology*. New York: Sharpe.

Vygotsky, L. S. (1983). *Sobraniye Sochinenii [Collected Works], Vol. 5*, Moscow: Pedagogika Publisher.

Vygotsky, L. S. (1987). *The collected works of L.S. Vygotsky*, in R. W. Rieber, & A. S. Carton (Eds.). New York: Plenum Press.

Vygotsky, L. S. (1991). *Pedagogicheskaiia psikhologiia [Pedagogical psychology]*. (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Moscow: Pedagogika

Walker, R. (1985). *Doing research: a handbook for teachers*. London: Methuen

Wallet, P. (2006). Pre-primary teachers: A global analysis of several key education indicators. *Background paper prepared for the Education for All Global Monitoring Report 2007. Strong foundations: early childhood care and education*. Paris, France: UNESCO.

Walsh, G., Sproule, L., McGuinness, C., Trew, K., Rafferty, H., & Sheehy, N. (2006). An appropriate curriculum for 4-5-year-old children in Northern Ireland: Comparing play-based and formal approaches. *Early Years*, 26(2), 201-221.

Wang, J., Elicker, J., McMullen, M., & Mao, S. (2008). Chinese and American pre-school teachers' beliefs about early childhood curriculum. *Early Childhood Development and Care*, 178(3), 227-249.

Watkins, C., & Mortimore, P. (1999). Pedagogy: what do we know? In Mortimore, P. (Ed.). *Understanding Pedagogy and its impact on Learning*. London: Paul Chapman Publishing

Wenger, E. (2006). Communities of practice: A brief introduction. Retrieved on December 2, 2011, from: [http://www.ewenger.com/theory/communities\\_of\\_practice\\_intro.htm](http://www.ewenger.com/theory/communities_of_practice_intro.htm)

Werner, O., & Schoepfle, G. M. (1987). *Systematic fieldwork. Foundations of ethnography and interviewing*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Wertsch, J. V. (1985). *Culture, Communication and Cognition: Vygotskian Perspectives*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Western Australian Curriculum Council (1998). *Western Australian Curriculum Framework*. Perth: Curriculum Council.

Wilks, A., Nyland, B., Chancellor, B., & Elliot, S. (2008). *Analysis of Curriculum/Learning Frameworks for the Early Years (Birth to Age 8)*. Melbourne: Victorian curriculum & assessment authority.

Williams, M., & Burden, R. (1997). *Psychology for language teachers*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

- Willig, C. (2001). *Introducing qualitative research in psychology: Adventures in theory and method*. Great Britain: Open University Press.
- Willig, C. (2008). *Introducing qualitative research in psychology* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). New York: Open University Press.
- Willis, J. R. (2007). *Foundations of qualitative research: interpretive and critical approaches*, Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Winch-Dummett, C. (2006). Successful pedagogies for an Australian multicultural classroom. *International Education Journal*, 7 (5) 778-789
- Windschilt, M. (2002). Framing constructivism in practice as the negotiation of dilemmas: An analysis of the conceptual, pedagogical, cultural and political challenges facing teachers. *Review of Educational Research*, 72, 131-175.
- Wits School of Education (WSOE). (2009). *The implementation of the national curriculum statement in the Foundation Phase*. Gauteng: University of Witwatersrand.
- Wojtczak, A. (2002). Glossary of Medical Education Terms: Part 5. *Medical Teacher*, 24(6), 658-660.
- Wong H. K., & Wong, R. T. (2009). *The First Days of School: How to Be an Effective Teacher*, Mountain View, CA: Harry K. Wong Publications.
- Wood, E., & Attfield, J. (1996). *Play, learning and the early childhood curriculum*. London: Paul Chapman.
- Wood, E. (2004). Developing a pedagogy of play. In C. Anning, J. Cullen and M. Fleer (Eds.), *Early childhood education: society and culture* (pp. 19-30). London: Sage.
- Wood, E., & Bennet, N. (2000). Changing Theories, Changing Practice: Early Childhood Teachers' Professional Learning. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 16 (5), 635-647.
- Woodhead, M. (2006). *Background paper prepared for the Education for All Global Monitoring Report 2007, Strong foundations: Early childhood care and education - Changing perspectives on early childhood: Theory, research and policy*. Paris, France: UNESCO.
- Yawkey, T. M. (1981). Sociodramatic play effects on mathematical learning and adult ratings of playfulness in five year olds. *Journal of Research and Development in Education*, 14, 30-39.
- Yin, R. K. (2003). *Case study research: Design and methods* Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Youlden, P., & Harrison, S. (2006). *The Better Play Programme 2000-2005: An evaluation*. London: Children's Play Council and Barnardo's.

## Appendix A –Letter of authorisation from KZN Department of Education



**kzn education**  
Department:  
Education  
KWAZULU-NATAL

AYESHA B.O. ESSACK  
P.O. BOX 65876  
RESERVOIR HILLS  
DURBAN

Enquiries: Sibusiso Alwar  
Date: 24 March 2011  
Reference: 0034/2011

### PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN THE KZN DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

#### **PROPOSED RESEARCH TITLE: An exploration of the nature of pedagogy in Reception Year classes in the greater Durban Area of Kwazulu-Natal**

Your application to conduct research in the KwaZulu Natal Department of Education Institutions has been approved. The conditions of the approval are as follows:

1. The researcher will make all the arrangements concerning the research and interviews.
2. The researcher must ensure that Educator and learning programmes are not interrupted.
3. Interviews are not conducted during the time of writing examinations in schools.
4. Learners, educators, schools and institutions are not identifiable in any way from the results of the research.
5. A copy of this letter is submitted to District Managers, Principals and Head of Institutions where the intended research and interviews are to be conducted.
6. The period of investigation is limited to the period: From 01 March 2011 to 31 March 2012.
7. Your research and interviews will be limited to the schools you have proposed and approved by the Superintendent General. Please note that Principals, Educators, Departmental Officials and Learners are **under no obligation to participate or assist you in your investigation.**
8. Should you wish to extend the period of your survey at the school(s) contact Mr Alwar at the contact numbers below.
9. Upon completion of the research, a brief summary of the findings, recommendations or a full report/dissertation/thesis must be submitted to the research office of the Department. Address to: The Director; Resource Planning; Private Bag X9137; Pietermaritzburg; 3200

The Department of Education in KwaZulu Natal fully supports your commitment toward research and wishes you well in your endeavours. It is hoped that you will find the above in order.

  
**Dr SZ Mbokazi**  
Acting Superintendent-General

*Dedicated to service and performance  
beyond the call of duty.*

**KWAZULU-NATAL DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION**

POSTAL: Private Bag X9137, Pietermaritzburg, 3200, KwaZulu-Natal, Republic of South Africa  
PHYSICAL: Office G25, 186 Pietermaritz Street, Metropolitan Building, PIETERMARITZBURG 3201  
TEL: Tel: +27 33 341 8610 | Fax: +27 33 341 8612 | E-mail: [education@kzndep.gov.za](mailto:education@kzndep.gov.za)

## Appendix B- Ethical clearance certificate from UKZN Research Ethics Committee



Research Office, Govan Mbeki Centre  
Westville Campus  
Private Bag x54001  
DURBAN, 4000  
Tel No: +27 31 260 3587  
Fax No: +27 31 260 4609  
[mohunp@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:mohunp@ukzn.ac.za)

22 March 2011

Mrs Ayesha BO Essack (205522348)  
School of Curriculum Development  
Faculty of Education  
Edgewood Campus

Dear Mrs Essack

**PROTOCOL REFERENCE NUMBER: HSS/0126/011M**  
**PROJECT TITLE: An exploration of the nature of pedagogy in Reception Year classes in the greater Durban area of KwaZulu-Natal**

In response to your application dated 18 March 2011, the Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee has considered the abovementioned application and the protocol has been granted **FULL APPROVAL**.

Any alteration/s to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach and Methods must be reviewed and approved through the amendment /modification prior to its implementation. In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number.

**PLEASE NOTE:** Research data should be securely stored in the school/department for a period of 5 years.

I take this opportunity of wishing you everything of the best with your study.

Yours faithfully

.....  
**Professor Steven Collings (Chair)**  
**HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE**

cc. Supervisor: Prof R Sookrajh  
cc. Mr N Memela/Ms T Mnisi



Founding Campuses: ■ Edgewood ■ Howard College ■ Medical School ■ Pietermaritzburg ■ Westville

## **Appendix C1-Letter of Informed Consent from the Governing Body and School Principal**

**To:** The Governing Body and Principal

**From:** Mrs A Essack , Faculty of Education, University of Kwa-Zulu-Natal , Edgewood Campus

Dear Sir/Madam,

### **RE: Request for Permission to Conduct Research in your School**

I am currently a Masters Student in Education at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Edgewood campus. My research topic is entitled: What are the beliefs and practices of Grade R teachers within a context of effective pedagogy in selected Grade R/Reception Year classes in the greater Durban area of KwaZulu-Natal?

#### ***Purpose***

The purpose of this study is to explore teacher beliefs and practices in Grade R classrooms as well as identify factors that impact on day to day practice.

#### ***Research procedures***

In order to get information for this study I will be conducting semi structured interviews with the grade R teacher. An interview schedule will be utilised, however the questions will be open ended to allow for flexibility. The questions will relate to the learning environment, beliefs on child development and learning, teaching strategies and approaches, teaching and learning activities, teacher beliefs on curriculum, assessment, classroom management and parental involvement Thereafter classroom practices will be observed during the week in scheduled times to allow for an in depth contextual study of the selected teachers classroom practices. I will be audio taping and writing down field notes where necessary.

#### ***Confidentiality***

All participants will be treated with fairness and honesty, and I will ensure confidentiality and anonymity. All information collected will remain confidential and a pseudonym will be used in the coding, analysis and reporting of the data.

#### ***Rights of the participant***

Your schools participation in this study is voluntary, and you have the option to withdraw from this study at any time. For further enquiries please contact my supervisor Professor R Sookrajh, UKZN- Telephone Number: 0312607259

Thank you for your co-operation.

Yours Faithfully

-----  
Mrs. A. Essack (Ayesha)  
Telephone number 083660749  
-----

#### ***Declaration of permission and acceptance to participate in the research***

I \_\_\_\_\_ governing body/ principal of \_\_\_\_\_  
School hereby confirm that I understand the contents of this document and the nature of the research project, and I consent to my school participating in the research project. I understand that I am at liberty to withdraw from the project at any time, should I so desire.

Signature of Principal \_\_\_\_\_ Signature of Researcher. \_\_\_\_\_

## **Appendix C2- Letter of Informed Consent from the Teacher Participant**

**To:** The Grade R Teacher

**From:** Mrs A Essack , Faculty of Education , University of KwaZulu-Natal , Edgewood Campus

Dear Participant

### **RE: Request for Permission to Conduct Research in your Classroom**

I am currently a Masters Student in Education at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Edgewood campus. My research topic is entitled: What are the beliefs and practices of Grade R teachers within a context of effective pedagogy in selected Grade R/Reception Year classes in the greater Durban area of KwaZulu-Natal?

#### ***Purpose***

The purpose of this study is to explore teacher beliefs and practices in Grade R classrooms as well as identify factors that impact on day to day practice.

#### ***Research procedures***

In order to get information for this study I will be conducting semi structured interviews. An interview schedule will be utilised, however the questions will be open ended to allow for flexibility. The questions will relate to the learning environment, beliefs on child development and learning, teaching strategies and approaches, teaching and learning activities, teacher beliefs on curriculum, assessment, classroom management, parental involvement etc. Thereafter classroom practices will be observed for a week during scheduled times to allow for an in depth contextual study of your classroom practices. I will be audio taping and writing down field notes where necessary.

#### ***Confidentiality***

You will be treated with fairness and honesty, and I will ensure confidentiality and anonymity. All information collected will remain confidential and a pseudonym will be used in the coding, analysis and reporting of the data.

#### ***Rights of the participant***

Your assistance in this study will be greatly appreciated and information specific to you will be shared upon completion of this research. Your participation in this study is strictly voluntary, and you have the option to withdraw from this study at any time. For further enquiries please contact my supervisor: Professor R. Sookrajh, UKZN- Telephone Number: 0312607259

Thank you for your co-operation.

Yours Faithfully

-----  
Mrs. A. Essack (Ayesha)  
Telephone number 0836607491

#### ***Declaration of permission and acceptance to participate in the research***

I \_\_\_\_\_ a teacher for \_\_\_\_\_ years, confirm that I understand the contents of this document and the nature of the research project, and I consent to participating in the research project. I understand that the researcher and relevant supervisors will have access to the transcripts of my interviews and written notes, but that any identifying information will have been removed. I also understand I have the right to review transcripts related to my involvement as part of this study, to ensure their validity. I agree that the research data gathered for this study may be published, provided I maintain my anonymity.

Participant \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_ Researcher \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

## **Appendix C3- Letter of information to parents about research being conducted at school.**

Dear Parents

I am currently a Masters Student in Education at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Edgewood campus. My research topic is entitled: What are the beliefs and practices of Grade R teachers within a context of effective pedagogy in selected Grade R/Reception Year classes in the greater Durban area of KwaZulu-Natal?

Your child's teacher has been asked to be part of this study by allowing her classroom practice to be observed. The observation visits will take place over a week during the month of May/June 2011.

### ***Purpose***

The purpose of this study is to explore teacher beliefs and practices in Grade R classrooms as well as identify factors that impact on day to day practice.

### ***Research procedures***

In order to get information for this study I will be conducting a semi structured interview with the teacher who is the core focus of my study. An interview schedule will be utilised, however the questions will be open ended to allow for flexibility. The questions will relate to the learning environment, beliefs on child development and learning, teaching strategies and approaches, teaching and learning activities, teacher beliefs on curriculum, assessment, classroom management, parental involvement etc. Thereafter her classroom practices will be observed for a week during scheduled times to allow for an in depth contextual study of classroom practices of the teacher. The children are not directly involved the research, only the class teacher is the research participant.

### ***Confidentiality***

All participants will be treated with fairness and honesty, and I will ensure confidentiality and anonymity. All information collected will remain confidential and a pseudonym will be used in the coding, analysis and reporting of the teacher's data.

### ***Rights of the participant***

The schools participation in this study is voluntary, and they have the option to withdraw from this study at any time. For further enquiries please contact my supervisor Professor R Sookrajh, UKZN- TelephoneNumber: 0312607259

Thank you for your co-operation.

Yours Faithfully

-----  
Mrs. A. Essack (Ayesha)  
Telephone number 0836607491



## **Appendix D: Selected Transcribed Interview –School B**

Pseudonym: Nicky

Age: 34

Gender: Female

Ethnic Group: White

Professional Qualifications: B. ED- Foundation Phase

Experience: 12 years

Grades Taught: Grade 1 and Grade R

Date of interview: 20 May 2011

Number of children: 22

No. of Support staff: NIL

### **Section A- Beliefs on the learning environment**

Prompt: **Tell me about your beliefs on:**

#### **1. creating a positive indoor learning environment**

*It's very important especially because they are going to spend so much of their time at school. It must be a positive experience especially in grade R as it is foundation for future learning. It has to be bright colourful, with charts pictures, posters, and different resources or mediums that are relevant to them. It must be an inviting, supportive, and safe environment where a child feels welcome. You want them to love coming to school, because it is a happy place with numerous fun activities that encourage active involvement.*

#### **2. setting up displays/posters to promote learning**

*It is important as well. It stimulates them and helps develop their cognitive, creative and social skills. A classroom has to be bright and colourful, with charts, pictures, posters, and different resources or mediums that are relevant to them. We have an "under the sea" display table this term. We change our display according to our theme. There are lots of books pictures, charts, shells etc. They teach other just by looking at the displays I hear them having a discussion—"Hey you know I saw a national geographic the other day about a whale and you know whales can do this". It sets up social interaction and social learning just by them picking up books and looking at charts and pictures. They love sharing their knowledge and talking about their experiences as they look at the display. They talk about their dads like to fish and go deep sea diving, etc. They look at the books and charts in the display and get so fascinated about things they look at. We do have numbers and colour charts as well as phonic friezes but they are only put up after we have covered a concept. It is great reference material to reinforce learning. Children learn well through this visual medium as we use it as tools which we constantly refer to on a regular basis. They are just not there for display but have a very educational value. We have a birthday charts, weather charts, and days of the week charts and cards which we use every day during circle time in the morning.*

### **3. displaying learners work**

*As teachers, we value what children do. This is their classroom as much as ours. It is important that you don't just choose a few that look nice, you put up everyone's work. They always look on the wall and they ask "Oh where's mine. OH there it is." They show this display to their parents when they come to drop them off.—"Look there's my work." It makes them feel proud of their achievements, they will also feel increasingly motivated and their self-esteem will be positively affected*

### **4. the importance and availability of sufficient resources for teaching and learning in Grade R**

*We are very blessed as we have lots of resources that we have built up over the years and a lot is also made by me as well. If we don't have something we adapt and find ways to accomplish our goal. In grade R children need to see, touch, taste, listen and smell in order to learn so you need resources to make the learning more meaningful and practical. It is very important to have sufficient resources but the teacher is by far the best resource. You can have all the resources you could possibly need but if you as the teacher do not know how to incorporate it into meaningful learning then it would be useless. I am very creative in using materials that are found easily like recycled material as well.*

### **5. the importance of a variety of play areas-book corner, fantasy corner, art area**

*It is very important to have a variety of play areas as it encourages learning through different media. They learn social interaction and social skills e.g. through doll and role play- in the fantasy area. You learn a lot about them when you watch them at play. "One will say I will the mummy , you be the baby"—Then you hear the " mummy" saying—"Now stop doing that right now"—Like how a mum will say it. We see what goes on at home and it gives us insight into what a child is thinking and how s/he views the world. The outdoor area develops gross muscles. Block play and construction manipulative play help with the brain development. The creative area with play dough, painting, cutting etc. helps develop a creative flair and fine motor muscles. The book corner fosters a love for books and reading even though they cannot read the words they can read using pictures. Having all those media available to them is vital as it helps develop children holistically, physically, intellectually, creatively, and emotionally. Children just don't play with one thing all the time. Some will spend half an hour in one area and some will spend 5 minutes in an area. They need a variety of things to stimulate them so we the teachers need to be the catalysts, we have to find the materials needed for each learning centre environment to ensure it encourages children to play in these areas and it caters for their individual learning choices.*

### **6. the importance of sufficient outdoor equipment e.g. climbing apparatus, swings, sand play, water play etc. and making use of available outdoor resources to enrich learning.**

*The garden area, jungle gym and the climbing apparatus are so important. It helps them use up all the energy they have. This morning it was raining and they were stuck inside and you could see them wanting climb up the walls and run around indoors. We find today that a*

*number of children need occupational therapy because they have not been exposed to a variety of outdoor experiences or sensory integration which develop their muscles, and spatial orientation. Children are entertained by television, video games, and computers and very little time is spent exercising their minds, bodies, and emotions. Outdoor play develops muscle tone and co-ordination. Children need to run barefoot on sand and on grass as some of them have not experienced this as their parents don't want to get them dirty. I had a child who refused to walk barefoot; he did not want to remove his shoes. Whilst they are using outdoor resources they are learning social skills, co-operative play, sharing, taking turns as well. Sometimes we use the outdoor area for specific teaching lessons especially developmental play, sand play for writing and drawing in sand and water play when we are doing capacity. We are very fortunate as we have sufficient amount of resources as this is very important for effective learning. We have a huge outdoor area and a garden area. Children learn to plant in the vegetable patch, and watch the plants grow. They are learning scientific knowledge incidentally. It develops learners holistically- physically, emotionally etc. Sometimes the outdoor is useful for teaching writing in the sand, or capacity through water play. PE and movement activities are also taught outdoors using the variety of equipment we have available like skipping ropes, bean bags etc.*

#### **7. whether children learn from each other in these environments**

*They pick up a lot from each other. They learn a lot of social skills that a teacher can teach directly all the time. They learn to share, play, respect each other, and take turns and be patient. Etc. They quickly learn that if they take other people things without asking there will be consequences. They learn what is appropriate and what inappropriate behaviour is. They even learn academic skills from each other.*

#### **8. The importance of supervision and guidance during outdoor activities**

*It is important as children need guidance at times. You just help them as you go along. Sometimes they can get a bit silly and misbehave. Some children cannot channel themselves appropriately into play and they need direction. They are teaching opportunities while teachers are supervising—The teacher can give play ideas like “why don't we use these blocks to build a rocket” “Why don't you play with so and so and do it together.” It shows them a way of constructive play. Sometimes they need help with their social play. They may have disagreements with friends and they need intervention. You get them to see what they did wrong and explain why that was not acceptable and you get them to see it from their friend's point of view. Sometimes you see children on their own and they don't seem to have any friends then you go them and say wouldn't you like to help so and so at the sand box and you encourage them in that way and try to help them socialize.*

### **Section B: Teaching strategies and approaches**

**Prompt: Comment on your beliefs about:**

#### **1. the capabilities of children in Grade R.**

*I think they are a lot more capable than we give them credit for. They are pretty much like sponges; they like to learn new things. They are naturally curious. I believe in starting with the existing strengths of the children, their experiences, their capabilities and build on those.*

*I read an article a while ago that said that most young children are naturally gifted but because we limit them and their opportunities and we tell them this is the right way and this is the wrong way we are not developing them to their full potential.*

## **2. whether teaching strategies are affected by the diversities children bring.**

*Children are unique and have varied capabilities. All children do not learn in the same way and are not capable to doing the same things all the time. They learn differently and at different paces. They have different backgrounds and experiences that they bring into the class. It all depends on the stimulation and exposure that they are given. A lot of our learners are strong and capable and have the ability to express their ideas, thoughts and feelings in quite an eloquent manner. There are so many different aspects of a child to consider, race, culture, language and nationalities, learning abilities and socio-economic status. It is very difficult to cater for this and we have to be very sensitive as to how we approach it.*

## **3. different strategies needed to cater for diversity, especially English second language learners,**

*Often when teaching a concept we will do it through a story, we will do it through music and movements, we will try kinaesthetic things, we will do it with physical manipulations using play dough or building blocks to construct. We will use art, drawings or even use white boards to write on. We use charts, pictures and concrete aids because sometimes it is something they may not have seen before. We use many songs and rhymes. We use every kind of medium that we can possibly find for the benefit of the learners as we are aware that not every child learns in the same way. I am fortunate that I have mostly English speaking children but we do have children that encounter problems with understanding. We use many concrete and visual aids together with gestures for learners who come from second language backgrounds. We try and isolate words and gestures so that learners can process what is being said. Like we say 'Hello' and not 'Hello' together with 'How are you,' in the same breath. This can be confusing to the child. We need to speak slowly so that they understand and process what is being said*

## **4. different strategies needed to cater for multi-cultural differences such as religion and cultural practices**

*What I have learnt most from children is just about life, Different walks of life, different ways of doing things, different ways that children have been raised. I have learnt so much about different cultures. One will say I don't eat pork, another does not eat beef. Some children will eat certain things on certain days, like they will only eat meat on a certain day; some children will eat in particular way. I get to find out why that is. I get to look at them through their eyes and where they have come from and sometimes say "Wow I didn't even think of it like that." I learn more about their family life, their cultures and languages, their relationships with others, their likes and dislikes and about things that interest them which in turn helps me plan activities that suit them. I have to be careful about things like halaal and kosher or even vegetarians. I give them a chance to talk about their traditions so I can learn and they feel valued. They stay for their religious holidays like Eid, Hanukkah and Diwali. We always talk about it when it's that time.*

#### **5. different types of interactive strategies used like whole class, small group and teacher directed**

*Different types of strategies are needed. We need to teach as a whole class and in small groups. Sometimes it needs to be teacher directed, especially when there is a lot thinking , reasoning and processing involved. I use different approaches depending on what I am teaching. We have circle time and that is whole class, we have readiness and that is small group. Sometimes music and PE drama and art is small group and whole class. In practically every subject area there will be times where it has to be teacher directed. PE, art, music, drama small group, early morning ring etc. all have times when they are teacher directed if the concept is being taught for the first time. Small group activities are very much teacher directed as we are teaching specific skills that children need to master and where the teacher is guiding and facilitating learning. At certain times children need input and feedback to help them develop skills incidentally e.g. during transitions, free play etc. Children must be simulated encouraged and involved. I don't always tell them what to do. I read an article a while ago that said that most young children are naturally gifted but because we limit them and their opportunities and we tell them this is the right way and this is the wrong way instead of guiding and stimulating them, we are not developing them to their full potential.*

#### **6. different types of activities needed to help Grade R children learn**

*Cutting, sticking, sequencing, matching, drawing, colouring , constructing, Using a lot of mediums to actually teach them whatever it is they need they need to know .Using songs rhymes, movement , art, drama etc. Children like to imitate. They need activities that involve the different senses. I like using a holistic approach and design activities that cater for the child social, emotional, physical, creative abilities and not just one medium. I teach in different rings, music, developmental play, art, story, drama, movement etc. We have a special language development ring that we have created this year and we are experimenting with it as we have found that even children who come from middle class backgrounds are not stimulated enough and need vocab enrichment as their parents do not have much time to chat and read to them. We feel that is very necessary as language is basically the key to living and learning*

#### **7. the use of cooperative learning**

*I use small group teaching a lot during school readiness. Sometimes children themselves are the best teachers. You will find children saying don't do it like that or do it like this. I give them tasks to complete in groups like art and you get to see those who lead and those who follow. Children are social learners and they love to learn from each other. They copy and imitate each other without feeling inadequate or intimidated. Even in teacher directed lots of interaction and cooperation takes place as we sing, answer questions, choose the right answer sequence and match.*

#### **8. the use of the chalkboard to promote learning**

*I don't have a chalkboard. I have a large white board and the children have small whiteboard. At least once a week they get out their whiteboards and they copy what I am doing on my white board. Sometimes it is when I am teaching a structured drawing lesson like drawing a fish. For example I say: Draw an oval in the centre. Now draw a triangle at the end of the oval. The chalkboard or the white board is not something that you rule out totally—you use them in different ways. Since it is their first time that they are learning to*

*write numbers or letters, the whiteboard is not a scary medium, they can simply rub it off if they are not happy with their formation or drawing. Sometimes when I teach a number they used their whiteboards and write 7 and draw seven. Sometimes they write a phonic letter like b- and draw a ball. This copying time is essential because they learning co-ordination, listening skills and building memory. It is done in a very interactive, relaxed and fun way. They look up and back down and back up which is a skill that they need to develop and adjust to. They are not given copious work to copy from the board on a piece of paper. We do a lot of drawing skills with them. We want children to be creative but they can't be creative if they don't have the exposure.*

#### **9. how Grade R children learn best.**

*They learn through fun activities via a lot of well-constructed play. In a pre- primary environment the opportunities for that are enormous as it help develop creative thinking skills. All different scenarios can be set up in a playfully constructed manner with a learning goal in mind. Grade R children do not respond as well as they could in a very a formal environment in fact they will just disseminate and regurgitate what you taught them without fully understanding and internalizing concepts as children like to explore to understand new things and master them.*

#### **10. the need to use discovery problem solving and play-based learning**

*Play just comes naturally to children. In this way children explore and learn about things around them. They learn to socialise with others and they also learn from each other when they are playing together. For children learning must be hands on. They must feel, touch taste, smell and hear in order to learn. Children must be given lots of opportunities to play, explore, discover and learn. By incorporating interactive play or hands-on learning, children will make a connection to their lives and learning will be more meaningful. I read somewhere that play is children's work. That is what they should be doing at their age. By playing with beads, block. toys, clay, sand, puzzles and other natural and concrete materials they learn about size, shape, colour and texture which is important for emergent maths concepts. I use lots of well-constructed play as it helps to make learning fun and develops children social, cognitive, emotional and physical abilities. Through play children learn self-control and social skills. When a child is playing and discovering, there is a lot going on in their minds. The child is making connections and figuring out things. A good example is when we were learning the letter R. I told them we are going to make a rocket. I don't tell them how to do it. I just put toilet roll, paper, scissors etc. I did not give them any instruction except try and build a rocket. I just observed and asked questions as they went ahead and made their own rockets and figured it out themselves. That's what all of our teaching is based, on trying to develop creative thinkers who are going to be problem solvers. If you simply give very set ideas that are very prescriptive and not allow them to play and explore, they are only going to give back what you throw at them. What we need to do is to be able to receive and be willing to take the time to watch and listen.*

#### **10. the different classroom management strategies used.**

*It changes all the time depending on the situation. I often give my children opportunities to give their opinions and make decisions. But sometimes they need be told in no nonsense way how they should do something or how they need to behave and sometimes you allow a bit of lee way. As the teacher, I need to ensure that I have good control and sort of lead without being forceful but rather gently coercing and directing in a positive way. So my management*

*style is never the same it all depends on the situations in the class. Sometimes the children are given the freedom to make decisions and say what we should do.*

### **11. the need for establishing rules in the classroom**

*Rules are important otherwise there will be chaos. It is needed so that they can learn in an orderly manner. It helps to teach them what they can and cannot do. It teaches them to behave and respect everyone. We have a two week orientation at the beginning of the year where we talk to the children about our expectations and the need for rules and together we build a chart with our classroom rules. We take them to the different areas and we discuss the rules and sometimes we show them what is expected of them in these areas or we ask learners to demonstrate what is expected. We do a little bit each day so that they are not overwhelmed and by the end of the two weeks they have been orientated about the rules of the classroom and school. Thereafter throughout the year this is reinforced and revisited when the need arises. When children break the rules, then their names go in the sad face corner and if they change their actions their names are removed from the sad face corner. This really works because they don't like to see their names in the sad face corner*

### **12. the types of methods used to establish appropriate behavior and encourage discipline.**

*We have so many different ways. We have class motivation or group motivation—Marbles in jar, star charts etc. We also have individual motivational awards every week where certificates are awarded in assembly. These rewards spur on the willingness to want to constantly try harder. I just don't give awards for academic or work performance, it is given for being kind, packing away things etc. Children love to be recognised. They love to be praised and for their behaviour to be affirmed. There is this fine line between praise and encouragement. Certain things do deserve praise but most the things need on-going encouragement which I do via positive reinforcement. Sometimes if there is problem with behavior it should be used as teaching opportunity. I often use a puppet to dramatise appropriate and inappropriate lessons for children as they come from different home backgrounds and are exposed to different experiences and may be unsure as to what is appropriate and inappropriate as they do not know any better. Children often need guidance about how to play appropriately and some can be more assertive than others. I often read them stories, do lots of role playing and puppetry to model appropriate behaviour and discourage inappropriate behaviour*

## **Section C- Beliefs on planning, curriculum and professional development**

### **Prompt: Comment on beliefs regarding**

#### **1. the importance of planning**

*Planning is important it is never random. They are desired outcome that you want to achieve. We have a year plan, term plan and then a detailed weekly plan. We plan activities according to the Grade R schedule - different rings, music, developmental play, drama, early morning ring, art, movement, arrival time, free play and small group readiness and story ring. I think that it is important to even plan my play activities to ensure that there is learning focus and that it relevant to the children's experiences and builds on their knowledge in a constructive meaningful way. Lots of effort goes into*

*planning. We plan according to themes but our small readiness activities are mostly related to early math and literacy skills. I make sure that I am well planned because if I am unplanned then that is where the discipline goes off. I try to make my lesson exciting so that learners will be so involved that they will not have time to misbehave*

## **2. about sticking rigidly to the planning schedule**

*Things don't always go according to plan. Often when we are teaching we find that we sometimes chop and change depending on situations that arise in the class As a teacher you have be flexible and adaptable—like a chameleon –Where you are metamorphosing to what the children's needs dictate*

## **3. the kinds of activities used in planning**

*Throughout the day in different ways they sing and do creative movements. In the early morning ring we do sing a lot,--counting songs, phonic songs, weathers songs. If it is a maths readiness lesson on shapes—they will sing a shape songs. Children love to sing and move so a lot of readiness concepts are taught through song and movement. We also have a formal music ring which we do once a week—which is a focused music lesson and exposes them to rhythm and instruments etc. Ever week we have a drama ring. I told you about our focused language ring. They are taught PE, art, and all sorts of skills using different activities.*

## **4. the use of worksheets**

*The uses of worksheets start in the second term. In the first term children are still developing their hand muscle coordination. It is not something that you rule out totally. The emphasis is on active learning and so 'worksheets' are kept to a minimum but they are used at appropriate times. The children are quite capable and the worksheets used are more to do with cutting, sticking and colouring. In addition to worksheets we use construction toys, puzzles, building blocks, legos, stencils, play dough, paint and games.*

## **5. the use of phonics in planning**

*We do introduce letters and phonics, but avoid the use of a formal approach. We prefer, instead, to build phonic awareness by what is known and relevant in the children's environment...their names, brand names, objects, events and things of interest. We us action songs, clapping, rhymes poems and stories to teach phonics. It is done incidentally.*

## **6. the positive and negative aspects of the curriculum**

*Our Grade R Programme is an eclectic one that is based on the L.T.A. (Learning through Activity) School Readiness Programme of the ex Natal Education Dept. and developed further through insights from the present curriculum. We are confident that our present Grade R curriculum meets the National Curriculum Statements in terms of Literacy, Numeracy and Life Orientation and moves far beyond them. The curriculum prescribes the minimum and many children are capable of more. It is not as detailed and tailored to the needs of Grade R as is the L.T.A. Curriculum. The present curriculum needs to be more extensive, enriching - and challenging! There must be an order in the concepts that are being taught. The NCS curriculum seems to be more geared towards a formal didactic way of teaching and learning. Why throw the baby out with the bath water? Our existing practices are already compliant with the principles of the NCS. It's not as if I am not achieving the*



*outcomes from the NCS. I use the NCS as a guideline and in fact I feel I go beyond as I'm preparing the learners in all developmental domains but in well-constructed play and activity based method*

#### **7. the use of FFL**

*We have seen these documents are not using it as it is too formal in its approach. We do not even have the workbook from the Education Department. We have a curriculum that is working so why fix something that is not broken.*

#### **8. the change to CAPS next year**

*We have seen the new CAPS document but it looks like it is basic competencies or outcomes that are emphasised. It is very prescriptive in its themes and content. We find that is pretty much a minimum of what a Grade R is able to achieve. We find that 5/6 year old is capable of much more if they are given enough stimulation and encouragement. We are not too worried about it as we can adapt any curriculum like we are doing now and make things work for our learners*

#### **9. the kind of pedagogy the curriculum promotes**

*The LTA curriculum has a lot of emphasis learning through play which is my philosophy of learning and teaching. I just fill in the relevant outcomes from the NCS to meet departmental requirements. I follow a skills based, play enriched curriculum which is what the LTA is all about. We work through a series of learning goals and learning is firmly set in a context of play. Learning in our school is planned to encourage, motivate and inspire.*

#### **10. the support received to implement the curriculum**

*We do not count on the education department for support with regard to the curriculum. We get a lot of support from our principal and colleagues at school. The more seasoned teachers mentor the new teachers. We work as a team and are constantly engaging in new ideas, surfing the internet and learning from each other. If there are courses available that will benefit us, then we are lucky as our school will pay for us to attend*

### **Section D- Beliefs on assessment**

Prompt: Comment on your beliefs on

#### **1. the importance of assessment and what should be assessed.**

*It is very important to assess a child holistically. For instance there is a child who when it comes to language based activities his listening skills are shocking as he does not appear interested but when it comes to physical and creative activities his listening skills are brilliant, because that captures him. Assessment is continuous. You are assessing without realising it. You look at a learner outdoor and you see this child never goes on the jungle gym or see a child who never goes to the drama corner. You ask why he isn't and try and encourage him/her. This is of great value. It alerts you to fact that some children need added help. It helps you reflect and gauge how successful your teaching is and maybe change the way you are doing something to help a child understand something better. Assessment helps us gauge children's strengths and weaknesses*

## **2. how assessment is conducted**

*From the time they walk into school we are assessing them without them knowing it. You watch how they enter the class. How they say goodbye to their parents, where they leave their bags, do they have to be reminded all the time about the morning routine. They know when they enter their class to look for their group picture and begin the task set out-- When we are doing our group work that is where assessing the most formally as we have something that is planned to assess and it is just not a haphazard thing. This is where we plan what we are assessing whether it is cutting skills, how they hold a pencil, their listening skills, position in space etc. We assess phonic skills, counting skills, language skills etc. We also assess during circle time but this is more informally, how they respond to a question, do they participate. Every day I chose 3/4 learners that are special targets for observation and make notes about their responses. By what a child volunteer's we can gauge their understanding, We assess their number memory, their story memory, listening skills, speaking skills, social interaction skills etc. all day.*

## **3. the use of assessment to inform parents**

*I have a casual interaction with parents when they come to leave their children. I have interviews which are formal and tabled on the calendar in the first and fourth term. In the second and fourth term I send out reports to the parents. Our reports are very detailed. We will never send out a report where something is a surprise to the parents. If there is problem as sometimes there are children that need extra help from occupational therapy, speech therapy etc. so we call parents during the year and offer them guidance. Our school has access to a remedial teacher, occupational therapist and speech therapist that work part time on the school campus however; parents have to pay separately for their services. Sometimes if a child excelled in a particular area they send home a certificate or a special note to the parent.*

## **Section E- Beliefs on parental involvement**

Prompt: Tell me about your beliefs on:

### **1. the value of parental involvement.**

*It cannot be overemphasised. The home is the first place of learning and I think parents don't fully realise that. But sometimes parents have unrealistic expectations. You have parents come in and say I don't want any of this playing stuff. I want to see my child learning and I tell them you are in the wrong environment because playing is how Grade R children learn. They want to see written work and content and that is how they think they can gauge how much their child has learnt. When they come in they want to see their children's books which are their memory of their school experience and it hard to relate to them that in Grade R learning is more practical than written. Often we have to educate the parents on our method of teaching and about the holistic development of the child. Sometimes too much involvement can be a bit of a problem. This year for the first time I have had to tell a parent to back off. The parent organises everything for the child and is not giving the child a chance to be independent and do things for herself.*

## **2. whether the lack of parental involvement hinders learning**

*We find now that parents are doing less than they used to and this is affecting learning. Parents are too busy and cannot support their as much as we would like. That is why we had to start this language ring. Parents are working hard and they are burnt out when they come home. They do not have the time to read to their kids. There is this tendency to want to opt out. On the want hand we understand it but on the other hand we can't endorse it. We try to encourage parents to take responsibility. A lot of parents think that quality time is lets go and get 3 DVDs and a bucketful of KFC. Technology has played a role in diminishing parental involvement. A lot of money is spent but the end value is much less than if they took the child to the beach/park/played a game/ worked in the garden etc. A lot of our children are more technology literate, cell phones, wee Nintendo etc. but they lack cutting skills, social skills etc. With most parents they are trying to put food on the table, pay the school fees etc, and there not as much input as there should or could be. Often I am trying to encourage parents to be responsible and to acknowledge their role. Sometimes parents hand over responsibility to older brothers and sisters. It is them who are doing the homework and helping with cutting of phonic pictures and seeing if they have their stuff etc. They come to class ask how their sibling is doing. It is such a sad thing as they are children themselves. Parents think that if they send their child to school it the teacher's job to educate their child and they fail to acknowledge their role in the process of learning. I guess with the hard economic times even with middle class parents you can understand but is just quite sad. When I first started teaching events and the help would be piling in, what could they do etc. they would be here no matter time. But what I have found over the last few years that we are now struggling to get parents to be involved and we have had to cancel events because we get a no show. You get like three return slips for an event so you know can't host it. We arrange for parent to listen to a psychologist or a nutritionist etc. because parents to be in the know how to best raise their child and there were just a handful of parents. I guess it is bit difficult because they have to make arrangements for their children or they are working etc.*

## **3. how you cater for parents from diverse language backgrounds and understandings?**

*Most of the parents who send their learners to our school are from middle class backgrounds and so many of them can understand English. On the rare occasion that there is a parent who needs help with translation we will find someone who can. We are aware of some religious events that take place—like fasting in Ramadaan and so we will not schedule events in the evening as we know parents will not be able to attend.*

## Appendix E- Selected Observation Schedule

School: B

Pseudonym: Nicky

Dates of observation: May 23<sup>rd</sup>- May 27<sup>th</sup>, 2011

Y=Yes, N=No,

S=Somewhat

Number of children: 23

Observation focus	Y		N	Comment
<b>A- Classroom Environment</b>				
1. The atmosphere is warm and welcoming.	✓			The teacher greets the learners activities are set out and the children get involved- Enough space --Carpet area, toys, books, puppets, lots of learners work on display, display table, colourful charts & cd player.
2. Organisation of the classroom is creative and facilitate child centred learning and teacher directed learning. There is sufficient space for children to work at different levels.	✓			There is sufficient space for children to work at different levels. The classroom is large enough. The teacher uses the space creatively by rotating groups from the tables to the carpet area.-Enough space for small and large group and construction space. The classroom is organized with materials clearly labelled with pictures and words and stored at the child's level to encourage maximum independence.
3. Appropriate displays of children's own work.	✓			Children were pointing to their work on the wall. One child was observed tugging at his mum to come and see his work.
4. Interactive theme tables are visible	✓			Theme table visible in the classroom. Current theme was sea. Books and pictures on display. Even one picture with learner in the class with a fish caught by him was observed as the theme was on the sea. Shells and other sea toys and charts. Children where reading from the corner and talking to friends about aspects on the theme table. One child came up to me a book on whales to show me.

5. Different learning centres are visible.—book corner, fantasy corner etc.	✓			Book corner and construction are visible in the classroom but the fantasy corner and creative corner, was set up for free play time in other areas of the school and was manned by supervising teachers. Children were observed in the fantasy corner pretending to be superman, or playing mummy cooking or acting like a doctor. Quite and active activities observed as some children read a book in the book corner and others played in the construction area.
6. Appropriate posters and charts are displayed-birthday chart, colour chart, weather chart, alphabet and number friezes etc.		✓		Colourful charts are visible. Reference was made to the charts during the lessons if needed. Display of learners work visible. Tangram house picture, drawings done by children. Looks like a balance-children's work and resources. However pictures with diversity, charts, --No signs of any multicultural identity in the class, via the displays.
7. The environment is predictable and orderly.	✓			Learners are used to a routine –they come in and choose an activity to do without the teacher having to say a word. They move to their group table and immediately get on with tasks laid out. They know the drill for free play and readiness activities. Lots of order visible as children appear to know the rules and what is expected of them in the class and the different centres.
8. Children are actively engaged in the learning activities with a variety of resources.	✓			Children were constantly actively engaged. Plenty of resources available like puzzles, dolls, toys and play dough. Children had opportunities to initiate their own learning in the different centres provided during free play. A variety of activities were available. Children moved freely to different learning centres and were not restricted to a particular one. One child walked in heels, with handbag

				and baby doll in hand. One boy had a doctor's coat on with a toy stethoscope and was checking a baby dolls 'heartbeat'. Children reading books, playing with construction toys, building puzzles, threading beads, moulding animals and using play dough. During school readiness lessons -were making shapes with match sticks, cutting cookies from play dough and completing worksheet activities during the week.
<b><i>B-Outdoor Environment</i></b>	✓			Plenty of outdoor space. Safe, supportive, caring and well organised. Well maintained play equipment and jungle gym. Scooters and bicycle track visible. Huge garden, water play and sand play area. Children were observed playing on the outdoor equipment during PE and movement lessons and during Free play
1. Sufficient space for children to play and do activities.				
2. Safe outdoor equipment-slides, jungle gym etc.	✓			All equipment was safe and well maintained. Water and sand play equipment are covered when not in use. The children played freely on the jungle gym, slides, climbed ropes, ran on the grass, and played with sand and water. Opportunities for physical social, emotional, cognitive development were created as children wrote in the sand and water, waited their turns and had lots of fun. The teacher was always visible and alert ensuring that the children played safely.
3. Equipment for activities—bean bags, skipping ropes, hoops	✓			Hoops, bean bags and balls were used during PE lessons. Children used these items during teacher directed lessons for PE but they were also available during free play time as well. Fantasy play equipment and construction toys are also used during free play time.

<p><b><i>C-Relationships-Teacher Child and child to child</i></b></p> <p>1. Teacher shows affection by smiling, touching, holding, and speaking to children at their eye level throughout the day, but especially at arrival and departure times.</p>	✓			<p>The teacher is warm and caring – She sits on a low chair so that she can be at the level of the children and not tower above them. They are eager to share their experiences. She encourages children to participate and guides them in activities. She is in the class well before their arrival- I arrived at for my morning sessions at 7:30 in the classroom and the teacher and learners were already interacting as the class was alive, buzzing and happy. Children hugged the teacher during departure times. Departure was very orderly.</p>
<p>2. The sound of the environment is marked by pleasant conversation, spontaneous laughter, and excitement.</p>	✓			<p>The children are free to communicate with each other. They were encouraged to share their experiences. Lots of laughter and chatter between children and children as well as teacher and children. The children were even comfortable chatting with the principal who walked in during a free play session.</p>
<p>3. Discipline is based on respectful and trusting relationship between teacher and learners.</p>	✓			<p>It is evident that clear rules have explained to learners. A happy and sad corner is used to encourage discipline in a positive manner</p>
<p>4. Positive social interactions are observed.</p>	✓			<p>Teacher is constantly encouraging and engaging with learners. ‘Remember we do not shout out’, ‘Let’s all stand and make a circle like little mice—softly’. Teacher spoke in soft tones- Seemed to have a calming effect.</p>
<p>5. The sound of the environment is characterized either by harsh noise or enforced quiet.</p>			✓	<p>There is a constant buzz in the class. There is no harsh voice or enforced quite. Children are actively engaged in tasks. The teacher was soft spoken and the children were not loud and noisy.</p>
<p>6. The teacher uses redirection, positive reinforcement, and encouragement as guidance or discipline techniques</p>	✓			<p>Lots of positive encouragement and redirection observed. When a child did not observe a rule the teacher</p>

				redirected the child to the rules chart and explained the need to observe the rule.
7. The children are motivated and excited about learning	✓			Activities are stimulating and engaging and the children appeared motivated as they involved in their tasks.
8. Teacher enhances child's confidence and self esteem	✓			The teacher encouraged children. Took the time to listen to a child's response even it was long. Words of praise were constantly used. Children who were well behaved had their names put in the happy face corner. Once children observed their colleagues names being placed in the happy face corner, other learners try to model this behaviour.
9. Children are cooperative with each other	✓			Lots of interaction and co-operation. They share and help one another. Work well in groups
10. Take turns and respect each other	✓			Noticed often that they waited for their turn if they wanted an outfit from the fantasy corner or if they wanted a specific toy or even to play on the swing. There were lots of opportunities for collaboration.
11. Initiate activities	✓			Lots of opportunities for them to initiate activities during free play. Also seen during language ring, teacher demonstrated they copied—moving like waves, pick up shells, listen to the shell in the ear. All children were going on an imaginative sea walk. Copying the teacher's action.
12. Listen to others	✓			Respect for each other is noticed as they listen to what their colleagues or teacher is saying.
13. Share their thinking –Communicate ideas	✓			used lots of open ended questions and invited the learners to imagine, elaborate, and tell stories She allowed children to express whatever they're were thinking. She



				did not demand a response, but left space for the children to answer thoughtfully in this way she encouraged creative thinking, problem solving and imagination.
<b>D. Teaching and learning –Classroom Instruction</b>	✓			The teacher asked the children for their ideas and opinions and built on their thoughts.
1. Links are made with the child’s life world and the learning experience under discussion. Teacher moves from the known to the unknown.				
2. Teacher uses a variety of teaching strategies e.g. whole group, small group. Etc.	✓			Uses group teaching regularly as learners were familiar with routines.
3. Specific strategies are used to ensure that each child’s unique needs and individual learning styles are met. Pictures charts etc. are used to enhance learning.		✓		Used a lot of concrete aids, pictures and repetition to assist those who were not coping or did not understand. Used different teaching styles such as songs, games . role play and stories. During the week of observation no materials/activities / songs that catered for diversity
4. Children are involved in concrete, three-dimensional learning activities, with materials closely related to children’s daily life experiences.	✓			Children were constantly engaged with concrete learning activities, in the fantasy corner the activities resembled real life experiences as one child had eggs and shouted out that he was baking a cake. Another child was carrying a baby and relayed that she was taking the baby to the doctor as the baby was sick.
5. The teacher extends children’s knowledge using the scaffolding technique and asking open ended questions, prompting thinking skills by suggesting alternatives.	✓			Lots of questioning such as what do you think will happen if I we do not tie our shoelaces? Children s learning is mediated rather than directing the learning experiences. Children were given a chance to make a rocket but no directions were given. The teacher walked around mentioning: why don’t you use a shape or what if you fold the cardboard like this. Suggestions were given to direct their learning experiences

6. Teacher asks questions that encourage children to give more than one right answer.	✓			Asked questions like: “What do you think will happen now?”,
7. The teacher is responsive and builds on and shares children’s contributions.	✓			Teacher commented “Wow I did not think of it like that. Let’s see if your idea works”
8. Play based approach to teaching and learning is used.	✓			provided lots of opportunities for block play, construction, painting, drawing, cutting, sticking, movement, dramatic play , singing and outdoor activities
9. Teacher demonstrates awareness of fine motor skills needed. Children colour, draw , trace, use of scissors, mould play dough and paint	✓			Seen during school readiness lesson and art lesson.
10. Teacher uses the chalkboard regularly.	✓			Use of white board observed. Art lesson on drawing a fish was conducted on the whiteboard as the children followed the sequence of steps to create the picture.
11. When teachers try to get children involved in activities, they do so by stimulating children’s natural curiosity and interest. They encourage learners to explore and discover the environment.	✓			Seen during Free play activities.
12. Language is taught in communicative ways.	✓			The teacher has a specific language ring which was observed. Lots of concrete aids were used. Children were given an opportunity to talk, describe, listen to a story and relay the story. The entire lesson was interactive with lots of speaking and listening opportunities. The next day the children dramatized the story during circle time. The classroom environment encourages children to listen to and read stories, notice print in use in the classroom, engage in dramatic play.
13. Strategies such as rhyme and song are used to reinforce emergent literacy and numeracy.		✓		Seen during circle time, music ring and school readiness ring. No songs from different cultures were heard. Transition songs were used to calm the children before the next activity.
14. Opportunities are created for outdoor activities that develop large motor muscles.	✓			Seen during developmental play

				and free play and outdoor play
15. Children have daily opportunities to use puzzles, Lego, markers, scissors or other similar materials in ways the children choose.	✓			Seen during free play and art activities
16. Large group, teacher directed instruction is used most of the time.			✓	Mixture of methods
17. The teacher tells the children exactly what they will do and when. The teacher expects the children to follow her plans.		✓		No the children are given a chance to initiate activities. Sometimes though she have to show them how to do something and they must follow. If she teaching a specific concept.
18. Children use workbooks, worksheets, flashcards, and other abstract or two-dimensional learning materials.		✓		Children completed two worksheets. No tasks or worksheets or flashcards used that had words or greeting from different language.
19. Teacher expects children to sit down, watch, be quiet, and listens, or do paper and pencil tasks for major periods of time.			✓	Constant active engagement with concrete resources.
20. Reading and writing instruction emphasizes direct teaching of letter recognition, reciting the alphabet, colouring within the lines, and being instructed in the correct formation of letters.			✓	Teaching of reading and writing done incidentally in a play method
21. Teacher expects children to respond correctly with one right answer.			✓	Lots of open ended questions used “What do you think will happen next”
22. Memorization and drill are emphasized.			✓	Revision does take place but not in a regimental fashion.
23. There is clear evidence of additive multilingualism			✓	This was clearly lacking. No reference was made to any other language except English
24. The teacher uses a variety of strategies to enhance communication- rephrase, code switches, peer mediation etc.		✓		No evidence of code switching.
25. The teachers own language competence meets the needs of the learners.	✓			All the learners appeared to understand English in the class even though they were from different language backgrounds.

26. Productive use is made of transitions to foster learning and social development.	✓			Children were observed packing away thins and cleaning up.
<b>E. Planning, Curriculum and professional development</b>	✓			Detailed lesson plan observed. The moment on walks into the class there is an organised structure
1. Evidence of well planned lessons, with work schedules and schemes- a clear daily program structures the learning environment.				
2. Appropriate time is given to different aspects of the curriculum—language and numeracy development, art, drama, song, physical development and movement etc.	✓			Follows the Grade R schedule and allocated times
3. The daily program is flexible and caters to incidental needs		✓		
4. Routines are an integral part of teaching and learning.	✓			Seen as an organised session as children and teacher appear to be comfortable with changes in routine
5. There is a balance between routines, child initiated activities, and teacher guided activities as well as outdoor and indoor activities. The daily program reflects cohesion and coherence	✓			Lots of cohesion as activities unfolded easily
6. Regular curriculum/planning meetings held with other colleagues/HoD/ principal	✓			Once a week all the teachers meet with principal. Observed them sharing teaching and planning ideas during the meeting. Even heard one teacher mention a book she read on play that her colleagues should read
<b>F. Assessment</b>	✓			Assessment file seen. Learners asses holistically in all developmental domains.
1. Assessment is based on the holistic development of the child.				
2. There is evidence of on-going continuous assessment	✓			Was evident at 7:30 am in the morning.
3. A variety of different observation and assessment tools are used.	✓			Seen in the morning when a child was matching colour beads with the card pattern while teacher observed. Seen writing notes in a little book at different intervals—when a child counted etc.

4. Evidence of appropriate reports to parents.	✓			Very holistic report to parent— Copy seen.
<p><b>G. Observations of parental involvement</b></p> <p>Child was observed tugging at mum to come and his work. Casual chats were observed as they came in and dropped off their children or picked up their children from the class.</p>				
<p><b>H. Observation of School readiness lesson as it unfolded using the words of the children and teacher where possible.</b></p> <p>The lesson began with revision of ‘shapes’ including both 2-D and 3-D shapes. In a bag Nicky put some 2-D and 3-D shapes and asked children to sit in a circle. They sang a song ‘<i>What is in the bag? What is in the bag? Eya, eya, ey</i>’ while passing the bag to their next friend. When the teacher told them to stop, the child who had the bag put his/her hand in the bag, and felt a shape and described it. The rest of the children tried to guess the described shape. The shape was then removed, identified and described in detail. They continued with activity until all the shapes in the bag were revealed. She then proceeded to take all the learners outside into the school hall and made all the children stand in a circle.</p> <p><b>T-</b> We have been learning about shapes. What shape is this that we are standing in?</p> <p><b>CLASS-</b> Circle</p> <p><b>T-</b> We are standing in a circle with our hands at our sides and there are lots of open spaces. When we join hands what happens to the circle?</p> <p><b>C1-</b> We close the circle.</p> <p><b>T-</b> Okay lets hold hands and close the circle. Now let go of your hands. What happens? See the open spaces. <i>(The children open and close hands to understand open and closed lines.)</i></p> <p><b>T-</b> Now we are going to play a game. I want to choose a fish and a shark. Let me choose someone who has been standing and listening beautifully. OH this is so difficult because you are all sitting so nicely. Jaden you can be the shark and Lebo you are the fish. Now the rest of us, we are going to be like the sea. We need to let the fish in and out by opening or closing the circle. We have to protect the fish because the shark wants to eat the fish. If the fish comes by you, you open quickly and let it swim in or out because we don’t want the shark to catch the fish.</p> <p><b>CLASS-</b> <i>The children all played the game and had lots of fun.</i></p> <p>Then the teacher asked the children to sit while she scattered different shapes all over the floor, enough for each learner. She played musical shapes as she tapped the tambourine fast/slow, the children had to walk around the shapes at the same pace as the beat. When she said ‘stop’ they had to find a shape, pick it up and sit down. Each child had to identify the shape they had found and hand it to the teacher. They then got in line ready to go to the class for small group readiness tasks to be completed by them. When all the learners got to the class they sat on the carpet as Nicky explained what each group will do.</p> <p><b>Ladybirds</b></p> <p><b>T-</b> Each one of you has a bag with numbers inside. You have play dough and different shape cutters to cut out with. You have to cut shapes to match the numbers in the bag. <i>(Teacher opens one bag and shows number 2 –asks).</i> How many shapes must I cut?</p>				

**C1-** two.

**T-** Show me two fingers.

(Children show her 2 on fingers)

**T-** All of you must get out your white boards and use the green side at the back to roll your play-dough. (*She shows the learners how to place the numbers against the board and layout the work.*) When you have finished you can get out your white board markers and trace over the dots on this laminated number cards to learn and practice your numbers.

### **Bees**

**T-** You have matchsticks and pattern cards. I don't need to explain. You know what to do. Please make sure I don't see any matchsticks on the floor.

### **Dragonflies**

**T-** Remember how we sorted toys like pizza slices, car tyres, clocks, into different shape boxes. Each of you has a big worksheet that is divided into three parts. Squares, circles, triangles. Stick this in your books. You also have this small sheet with pictures of a window, wheel, slice of pizza and you have to decide whether they are squares or circles or triangles. You need to cut them out from the small sheet and paste them in the correct place in the big sheet.

### **Butterflies**

You have to stick this sheet and wait for me. (The teacher walked around to ensure the other groups were settled. Then she returned )

She recapped opened and closed lines. She then asked the learners to close the curved line so that the mouse is inside the shape (*she watched and directed where needed as they proceeded*). Then she asked the learners to close the angular line in the next picture so that the mouse is outside the shape.

Next she asked learners to put their hands on their heads, put their hands under the desk, pick up their right hand, wave their left hand and put their left hand below their chins.

She then gave the learners four mice cut outs which they had to stick in the correct places as she read out the instructions.

Put the mouse inside the circle

Stick the mouse below the triangle.

Put the mouse on the left hand side of the rectangle.

Put the mouse under the square

*(She observed as they placed the mouse in each of the places and guided, cautioned when necessary as motivated and encouraged them along. This group received her focused attention. Lots of dialogue as she guided, observed and directed the children. She was sitting on a chair with the children in their group as they worked on the task. At the same time she watched over the other kids. The principal walked in at the time. She sat with one of the other groups and observed , as well as chatted with them.*

**I. Observations during a story lesson**

Nicky used an interactive puppet to relate a story on friendship and the importance of friends. The story built on the children's ideas. She asked lots of open ended questions like "*How do you make friends?*" "*What would you do if someone tells an ugly word to you?*" She used lots of interaction with the learners like repeating lines, asking questions, giving opinions and singing during the story ensuring that children felt part of the lesson. The children were captivated and responded to the puppet. The children were not listening to the story but were part of the development of the story

**J- Observation of taking register:** chose a child to be the counter who touched each child as she counted. After the counting was completed, she asked if anyone was missing from class that morning. The children gave names of their friends who were absent which were written on the white board and when completed they counted how many were absent.

**Appendix F:Proof of Editing.**

**Letter of confirmation: Proofreading**

Student's name		Title of dissertation
Ayesha Essack	Dec 2011	<b>An exploration of teacher beliefs and practices within a context of effective pedagogy in Grade R/Reception Year classes in the greater of Durban area of Kwa-Zulu Natal.</b>

This is to confirm that I have proofread Ayesha Essack's dissertation.

Regards,

Editor Bronwyn Jones

16 Melrose Avenue, Westville

Telephone: 0312663786

**Please sign attached disclaimer**

Disclaimer:

I Ayesha Bibi Osman Essack, student number, 205522348, have received editorial and proofreading feedback and understand that feedback is given in order to improve the document and as such it's my responsibility along with my supervisor to consider all changes and implement them as we feel appropriate even after plagiarism policies and other policies are considered that govern and regulate publication of intellectual property.

PLEASE SIGN YOUR NAME: ..... DATE: .....