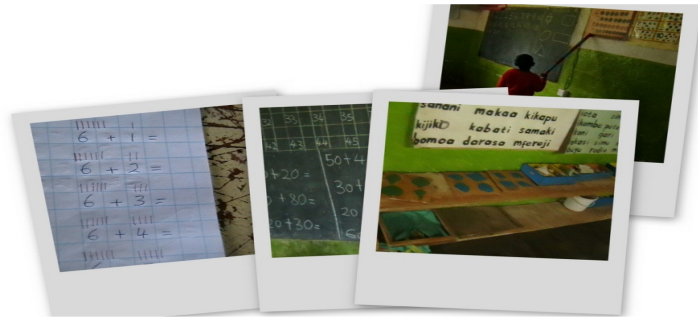


VOYAGE SIX FACTORS INFLUENCING TEACHERS' BELIEFS



In the next part of the journey

We explore the teachers' rationale for the children's educational experiences and the factors that might influence their beliefs about these experiences...

Join me now ...

to understand more on

the context factors...

6.1 A GENERAL INTRODUCTION

“Formal academic instruction emerged and was reinforced by a particular social and political climate rather than rooted in child development” (Zeng & Zeng, 2005:717).

In this voyage, I will discuss the factors influencing teachers’ beliefs about developmentally appropriate educational practices, which relate to question four in the study: What are some of the factors influencing teachers’ beliefs about developmentally appropriate educational practices?

Although each teacher discussed different factors, a nuanced interpretation portrays various sources of perceived pressure. Therefore, the dominant theme relates to the teachers’ concerns to plan for children’s educational experiences that respond to these perceived sources of pressure that follow in the discussion. Figure 42 (below) summarizes the factors influencing beliefs about the use of DAEP.

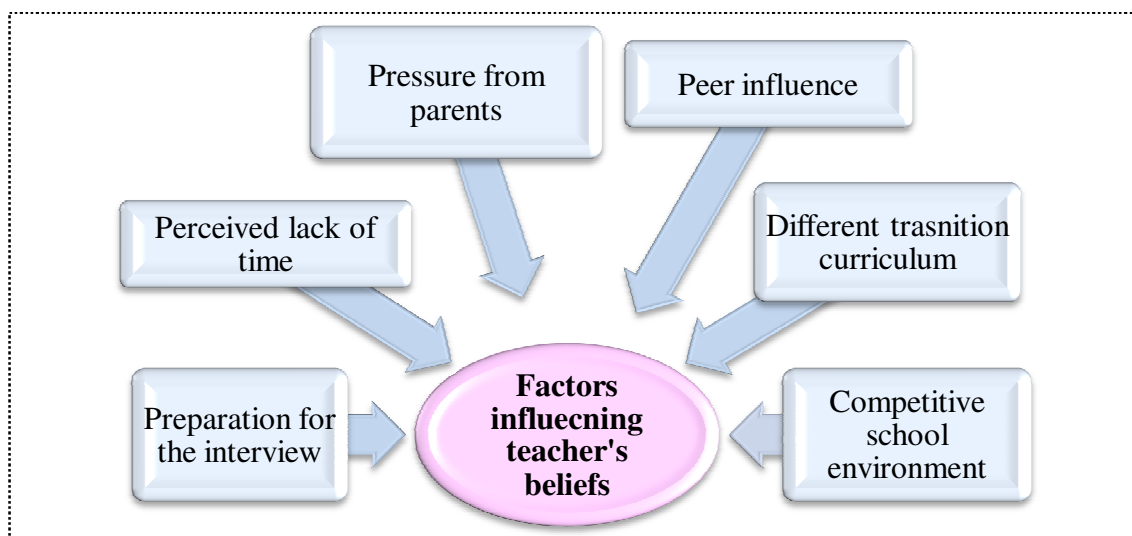


FIGURE 42: Summary of factors influencing teachers’ beliefs

6.2 RESPONDING TO PARENTS’ EXPECTATIONS

“They [parents and the community] say in that school, they don’t teach!”
[Belinda].

“Parents are increasingly under pressure to ensure that their children succeed and survive the education system” (Robinson & Diaz, 2006:51).

The following extracts from transcripts capture some of the sentiments that relate to how the observed educational experiences might reflect the teachers' response to parents' expectations:

[BE: They also have to know how to write, because parents expect that when their children come to school... they expect them to know how to write; and to read (silence)...so they are practicing] [BE01:131; 133; 134]. When a parent comes and see a child from another school can write, the child from another school cannot write so they say in that school they don't teach;][BE01:212-214]

[LE: ...the parents see the school that does well [in the interview] or the school that takes more children to standard one. You see when we teach them and we see that they do not do well, we are (mppts-as in self-sympathy), we find that there is something...parents are not happy if the child doesn't make [in the interview][LE01A:700-708; LE01:106-02]

[EN: Yes, you keep on telling the parent it is not a must for the child to write. The only thing we want is to make that child comfortable and practice with the materials, and then that parent says, no me I brought my child to write and read... When that parent comes to [school] at least goes through the exercise book he sees that's oh, that my child is writing that's what they normally do] [EN04:297]

[ST: Maybe if somebody brings a child to baby class after a week or at the end of the day he wants to see that, that the child already has written something, something on a book. Which is very wrong because that child from school has to train even how to hold a, a pen... and, a parent doesn't know that... Yah okay we are in a community [enlightened] but you see that maybe some will not understand at all][ST02:226-230; 234-236]

From these statements, it appears that the teachers expressed the perception of their role towards children and their parents in two ways: firstly, to meet parents' expectation for their children's learning, and secondly, to prepare children to fit in the primary school by equipping them with literacy skills. The teachers' beliefs centre on the parents having some sense of urgency for their children to acquire literacy skills. However, teachers limited parents' expectations to the 'educational' role of the preschool, where writing is perceived as the basis of the competence of the child. Therefore, such a perception might explain *why* the teachers focused on the children's *writing, copying and task-completion*, as observed in the study.

In contrast, learning involves more than just copying and task completion (Culbertson & Jalongo, 1999; Kostelnik *et al.*, 2004:327-8; Trawick-Smith, 2003:397; Neuman & Roskos, 2005:23). Children's learning activities must meet both their developmental needs and serve as skills for standards curriculum (Goldstein, 2007a:396; 2007b), as they enjoy their learning to solve problems (Gallagher, 2005:16) through meaningful literacy experiences (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997, in Neuman & Roskos, 2005:23).

Kieff and Casbergue (2000:42-43), together with Katz (1995:102-103), identify four domains of children's learning, which include the knowledge domain, consisting of learning facts, ideas, concepts, vocabulary and stories. The skills domain involves learning components of physical, social, verbal and counting skills through observations. Dispositions as a third category of learning involve mastering characteristic ways of responding to situations, which include inquisitiveness, sociability and unfriendliness. Finally, the feelings domain embraces children's emotional states. Culbertson & Jalongo (1999:130) suggest the use of a portfolio that includes 'notes about daily achievement, checklists showing areas of strength, child-selected work samples and even artwork and interest inventories that show that the school recognizes talents beyond academics'.

However, in what was a limited perception of the role of the preschool, teachers assigned a cognitive role to it, where children had to be '*reading and writing*'. In my view, this '*academic view*' of the preschool limits the range of activities and experiences that teacher's plan for the children. This belief originates from the requirements for transition to the primary school, therefore the teachers emphasize the *knowledge* domain at the expense of the other domains of child development that entwine in learning. This reflects observations by other scholars about the increasing trend to emphasise academics at the preschool in many parts of the world (Goldstein, 2007:396; Maccoby & Lewis, 2003:1074; Moyer, 2001:161; Parker & Neuharth, 2006).

Parents' anxiety about their children's academic success begins at the preschool (Robinson & Diaz, 2006:51). In what reflects how teachers interpret parents' anxiety, Belinda remarks "*parents expect that when their children come to school...they expect them to know how to write; and to read*" [BE01:131-134]. Stella adds her observation about such demands, that "*somebody brings a child to baby class after a week or at the end of the day he wants to see that, that the child already has written something, something on a book*" [ST02:226-230]. Belinda's and Stella's comments express their belief that parents push them to teach academic skills too soon. These sentiments reflect what Geist and Baum (2005:32) calls the '*yeah-but*' resistance, where early childhood teachers understand what is developmentally necessary for children's learning, but have their own reservations in implementing it. It is also consistent with Wien's (in Goldstein 2007b:380), findings that only two out of eight participants were able to balance the demands of a standards curriculum with meeting children's developmental needs. In contrast, teachers in Cassidy and Lawrence's study (2000) placed little emphasis on the

cognitive, language and physical domains, but more on the social and emotional dimensions.

The definition of a ‘preschool teacher’ connotes the image of a teacher whose role it is to *teach*, but the definition of teaching is problematic here. Broström (2006) introduces a dichotomous view of *education* and *care*, in what ought to be one seamless practice. In some contexts, such as in Denmark, where childcare is not synonymous with early childhood education, society places more emphasis on the care than on education. In contexts such as these, the introduction of ‘academic skills’ to children in the ‘care’ contexts might be termed inappropriate, while ‘too much care’ for children in the ‘education contexts’ is still inappropriate. In both of these approaches, there is likely to be a perception problem of what children ought to do at preschool. The dichotomous expectations result in ‘the early childhood error’ and the ‘elementary school error’. The former is the belief that adults and the environment minimally affect children’s growth’, leading to the negligence of the educative role; the former results in a pushdown of upper grade content and methodology to the preschool (Warner & Sower, 2005:25).

This dichotomy is problematic in the Kenyan context, where the Ministry of Education regards the preschool as both, while the parents and the teachers view it as a school context rather than a care context. Whatever the view, it is problematic because it presupposes discordant expectations. Moreover, the definition of a teacher presents another angle: who is a teacher? Does a teacher also help the child to gain the other pieces of knowledge? Perhaps the terminology ‘teacher’ might be more responsible for this *limited role perception* than if the term used were ‘*care-teacher*’, as a way of broadening the perception of the preschool teachers, whose roles require them to care for children first, before teaching them. Such a double identity would help to broaden the approach to teaching children.

When the preschool serves a variety of purposes, the teacher does not readily identify with the ‘childcare role’, but rather the ‘learning role’. The latter is prominent in the current study. This is also a shared understanding and interpretation of the school between the various stakeholders, apart from the Ministry of Education. There is need to ascertain the reasons for this obsession with ‘academic standards’, rather than the behavioural. Could it be that the ‘academic’ is more valuable than the ‘social-behavioural’ or ‘physical’? Perhaps, nowhere in the interview did this discordance

express, as in the lack of adequate exposure of children to materials, and the oversimplification of what children go to school to do. Regardless of the pressure felt by the teachers, their cognitive emphasis overruled other concerns. In all, the teaching strategy that the teachers used seemed to mirror the dichotomy of either playing or preparation for school transition.

Culbertson and Jalongo (1999) observe that although the parents talk against the practice of workbooks, they are the first to demand workbooks for their children as soon as possible. Barnes and Lehr (2005:111) identify teacher-obligations with regards to parents: ‘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’. However, they note “parents have been viewed by some teachers as irrelevant to the decision-making process of education and at worst as adversaries” (Barnes & Lehr, 2005:111). In this study, the teachers saw parents as interfering rather than facilitating learning. In one reference, one teacher suggested that some parents could be doing the homework for the children, whereas Enid suggested that parents should be tolerant of children’s individual differences:

[EN: A kid to pass that is what they want...either they want that kid to go to class one but they don't want to understand the procedure you are supposed to take while you are giving that child may be when you are introducing something you want that child to understand][EN04:205-207-01]

Regardless of parents’ demands for written tasks and for children to perform well in the preschool, Enid believed that there was a need to prepare the children to fit into the primary system. This is a belief that suggests her DAP practices reflect this role, in the context. Indeed, the roles that preschools serve generate the diversity of purpose, and therefore focus, as Broström (2006) argued. While some parents take their children to school to learn, others take them for childcare reasons.

Although the teachers in this study perceived parents and the primary school qualifying interview as sources of pressure, Belinda managed to strike what reflected as a balance in her teaching. She created time to teach skills, and for children to engage with free play. However, she did not engage the children in verbal interaction, even as they engaged with free play, which suggests a belief on her part not to interrupt on such occasions.

In my view, parents are genuinely concerned with their children's progress and ability to get admitted to the only good primary school on the compound, and if not, to the only other private school, immediately outside the compound. The context of the study as an isolated location has two implications: if a child fails to gain admission to either of these two schools, then another problem arises, where does a parent take him or her, when the nearest town is 40km away? This is a limited resource issue. Secondly, the location of the school predisposes teachers to open rather than closed relationships.

For example, it is common in this community to display the list of children successfully admitted, on a notice board next to a shop within the University compound. In a way, this list violates the privacy of the schools, as well as displaying their progress at the same time. Although the list might introduce social pressure in the way teachers prepare children for this interview (because each school wishes to present a positive social image), this also is an opportunity for parents to compare the preschools' performances, with the list also indicating the name of child admitted and the preschool they attended. In addition, it generates an impression among both parents and teachers that 'my child can read' or that 'I send all children for enrolment'.

Therefore, it is not surprising that all the teachers in this study thought it necessary to prepare children to 'fit' (with demands of primary school). Although good performance at the standard one interview is desirable for both parents and the schools, it does not reflect the true quality of learning or child development. The interview should test academic skills that children have learnt through rote learning and memorization. Research suggests that teacher-directed approaches on the long term effects on children's emotional wellbeing are negative (Burts *et al.*, in Parker & Neuharth-Pritchett, 2006; Charlesworth *et al.*, 1993), while the academic skills benefits acquired through rote learning are short-term (Marcon, in Parker & Neuharth-Pritchett, 2006). The issues of whether or not the children actually fit, or whether the teachers' concerns is not merely for them to retain their employment, since the parents have the power to hire and sack them, would require another study.

6.3 PREPARATION FOR THE INTERVIEW

“Competitive school environment... ‘They have to read and to know how to write... ‘Most of the things we do are to run; we are trying to chase the...what can I say, time or what?’ [Enid].

“...since so many schools appear to be struggling or failing, maybe it behoves us to reflect back to different times when Kindergarten seemed more relaxed and was fun” (Miller, 2005:260).

For Enid and Lenora, who were teaching at the last year of preschool, the pressure to prepare children to fit in standard one was their major concern, which was not the case among their baby class counterparts, except for Belinda who mentioned perceived pressure. They were all concerned to prepare children to fit with the demands and conditions of the interview. Enid believed that she ought to use pedagogic approaches that reflect the experiences of the primary school environment, and which encourages children to learn how to write from the chalkboard. Their sentiments follow:

[BE ...when it comes to the child to go to STD 1... fitting to go there to standard; they [sic-primary teacher interviewers] expect them to know how to read; to be a fluent reader][BE01:297-303]

[EN...when going for an interview that is what they will do...the way I know the situation...they have to read and have to know how to write from the blackboard...and you see that is because of the environment...there situation the way it is there][EN04:167; 169; 171-01]

[LE: That is why we teach them... To an extent that when they are going for the interview... They have known almost, we even...we can even teach them to an extent of knowing the provinces and all those that do not even come in lower classes][LE01A:686-690]

Both top class teachers appeared to believe that their teaching content ought to reflect that tested by the interview, as they both pitched the difficulty level of tasks to this expectation. Enid and Lenora commented about the difficulty level of the standard one interview in the following ways:

[EN: Whatever they do there [interview], it is tough, they do not bring things like one plus one or two plus two...because of that, we are a bit ahead. Most of the things we do are to run; we are trying to chase the...what can I say, time or what?’ By the time [of the interview], they are supposed to know how to read and write, do subtraction, addition, all those things, and these are the things which are normally brought in the interview][EN01:332-336]

[LE:And if we (pause) follow, eeh (pause) we just say that we teach these children letters only... the interviews are there... Children will not go to standard one without going through the interviews... That is where we are forced to go beyond [the preschool curriculum][LE01A: 660-668]

[EN:... we keep on insisting that they write from the blackboard to the exercise book...because...that is what they will do[at the interview] They might give them some work from the blackboard and then they do it may be on a paper on a piece of a paper. Those children who are supposed to go to class one, they have to read and have to know how to write from the blackboard...and you see that is because of the environment...there situation the way it is there][EN04:167-171-01]

[LE: That is why we teach them... To an extent that when they are going for the interview... They have known almost, we even...we can even teach them to an extent of knowing the provinces and all those that do not even come in lower classes][LE01A: 686-690]

Authors have suggested that the pedagogic approaches used in preschool in Kenya follow direct methods, which are not child-centred. The curriculum focuses on content beyond the children's ability level and development (Prochner & Kabiru, 2008). Biersteker *et al.*, (2008:243), and preschools in Kenya face pressure for skills-based learning. Geist and Baum, (2005:29) note that kindergarten teachers display resistance to use DAP and they should use a similar approach as the next grade teachers to avoid confusing children. Although Enid was sympathetic to the children and the 'overworking' circumstance at the preschool, she suggested that her approach to focus on academic skills might be helpful for the children to cope with the demands of the primary school. In fact, Enid linked the successful transition that their children experienced at the primary school to this 'overwork' at the preschool. She summarized this view in the following comments:

EN: mmh, to me it is a bit overworking, but it is helpful...when they are in primary, they are still doing well, they are not behind... It has been of good use to them: mmh, you know the way the situation is.... the syllabus of the primary school, we cannot say it is easy. It is hard for the children: even in nursery schools, they have to prepare them...when they go to class one they will find these things, math for homework, they will be given English, Kiswahili, sciences, some do C.R.E in class one, I don't know. All those things: So when they are here, we try to prepare them. [EN01:355-365]

However, as a primary school transition requirement in some settings (Mwaura *et al.*, 2008:128), the standard one interview reflects on issues of quality and limited resources in parts of Kenya. Some parents perceive certain schools as better performers than others, and therefore most schools are under pressure to use the interview to select high performing children.

Lenora linked parents' interests in a school to the school's performance in the standard one interview. She believed that parents enrol their children in preschools that perform well in the standard one interview. Moreover, she believed that a school's good performance (in the standard one entry interview) determined parents' satisfaction and their school's image:

[LE: these parents...if the child doesn't make [in the interview]...will lay the blame on the teacher...they might move the children to another school...just guessing that the teacher is the one with the weakness...][LE01:18-124-02]

Lenora believed that parents value the academic skills for their children upon which the interview and the well-performing schools focus, expressing her concern about the parents' negative reaction if children perform poorly in the promotion interview. Therefore, apart from avoiding blame, she feared that her employment depended on children's performance. Moreover, Lenora believed that the children's promotion to standard one reflected on a teacher's teaching effectiveness, expressing her concern on her self-image too:

[LE: Yah, ...because...if the child fails, the parents would lay the blame on the teacher. Yah, even the management will look at the teacher and say you have done nothing, so that pressure will make me even to overwork them... yah, because I will be harassed [when children fail], and I will not have peace, I might even lose my job, yah][LE02:671-679]

Lenora linked the performance in the interview to two concerns: her continued employment, because parents and management value such success; and her self-esteem as a teacher. McMullen (1999) identified some of the teacher characteristics that influence them to use DAP; as environmental stressors and personal characteristics, including self-efficacy, locus of control and trait anxiety, as well as educational and professional experience. Lenora and Enid's locus of control was the interview and its consequences as a determinant of their approach to plan content higher than the children's ability. 'Trait anxiety', defined as the tendency to perceive life events as threatening, relates to children's performance in the interview, and was a source of stress to these teachers (Cattell, in McMullen, 1999). Although the standard one interview is not about a national curriculum in Kenya, but a practice common in urban and well-performing schools, the findings reflect Kowalski *et al.*'s (2005:38) observation that teachers focus their teaching on areas tested by the national curriculum. Demands for

‘standard testing’ inhibit early childhood teachers from pursuing DAP (Goldstein, 2007:378; Geist & Baum, 2005:29).

The teachers’ trait anxiety not to use DAP is exacerbated by the lack of specific standards for the transition interview. Biersteker *et al.* (2008:228) note that preschool is not a transition requirement in Kenya. Although the guideline for preschool standards in Kenya (Republic of Kenya, 2006a) is explicit about the knowledge requirements, besides an elaborate guide by NACECE (2000) guideline for preschool education, the schools admitting the children do not share these values advanced by the preschool guidelines. This lack of a shared understanding of the preschool guidelines has led to an arbitrary approach the admitting schools’ use to select the content tested by the interview, as Lenora and Enid’s’ comments indicate:

[EN: “preschool teachers don’t know what to expect, look for paper after interview for future reference while preparing”][EN01:348-352]

The teachers use speculation of the presumed areas tested by the interview to plan their teaching, introducing a disjuncture between preschool pedagogy and content. Two issues are significant here. First, if the teachers speculate, then their self-efficacy about their ability to influence children’s learning outcomes is jeopardized (McMullen, 1999), second, the teachers’ speculative approaches to the interview, and a focus to teach academic skills undermines their approach to embrace appropriate practices.

Closely linked to the interview requirements are two concerns that the teachers expressed. These were different transition curriculum mentioned by the Montessori teachers and different transition requirements. Following is a discussion of the how different transition curricula or different transition requirements influence teachers’ beliefs and their use of DAP.

6.4 DIFFERENT TRANSITION CURRICULA/ REQUIREMENTS

“If I go on sitting with my materials... I will not have time to teach this child to know numbers 1-20, how to calculate mathematics, how to read” (Stella)

Jalongo *et al.* caution:

... it is imperative that the transition from home to school should not be so drastic as to cause psychological or emotional stress by imposing rigid schedules, long periods of

sedentary activity, confined spaces, unsafe equipment, or intense academic pressures on young children (2004:144).

The concept of transition involves preparing children to transition successfully to next class or to the primary school. Petriwskyj, Thorpe, and Tayler, (2005), observe that various levels of transition to school or between grades intricately link to teacher and school practices. Petriwskyj *et al.* (2005:59) identify three needs that make transition successful. These are communication linkages, coherence of experience, and system coherence. Communication linkages relate to the information exchanged between the home and the school or between the preschool and the receiving primary school. Coherence of experience ought to reflect continuity between the different school environments through which children transition and finally, system coherence is concerned with continuity in structure, process, and quality between the systems.

In addition, the level of ‘preparedness’ (Petriwskyj *et al.*, 2005:59) for children to transition between various levels of the preschool curriculum appeared to reflect teacher concerns. For example, Enid and Stella, who were the Montessori teachers in the study, were concerned about preparing children to transition to a different curriculum. Lenora linked transition requirements to changing times that now requires her to teach beyond the preschool curriculum. Stella and Enid suggested that the requirement to prepare children to transition to a different curriculum inhibited them from applying the Montessori approach, which requires the use of different materials. Stella articulated this concern thus:

[ST: But you see here in our environments, we only have Montessori in nursery schools, going in a different curriculum. We have to be careful, we know we have to give them also our Montessori as well as giving them what they are going to do, because if we I want to be a real Montessori... at the end of the day, maybe I will consume a lot of time, in activity work, than in doing the writing][ST01:195-197

[ST: because with Montessori, if we say now we are going to do the real Montessori, maybe all the time will be consumed by, these materials because they are so many. You will not have time to teach this child to know numbers 1-20, how to calculate mathematics, how to read...][ST01: 199]

Enid and Lenora agreed with Stella’s concern about different transition requirements:

[EN: the syllabus of the primary school, we can't say it's easy, it is hard for the children.. even in nursery schools, they have to prepare them, because we know when they go to class one they will find these things, math ...English, Kiswahili, sciences, some do C.R.E in class one, I don't know... So when they are here, we try to prepare them. We give them a lot of work and see if they can complete...][EN01:355-365]

[LE: when I started teaching nursery school, we used to teach only letters only not. ... Kiswahili even... was not there yes... Only vowels, it was like singing... So long as interviews, the child could be asked to ...to count, to say letter A up to Z... If that child says A up to Z clearly, that child has passed the interview][LE01A:714-722]

From Enid's and Stella's comments, the requirements of the primary school did not accommodate their full use of the Montessori approach to teaching. In particular, Stella cautioned that the Montessori system was not appropriate for preparing children to fit into a regular primary school, because of its emphasis on materials at the expense of content-based, teacher-directed learning, requiring a push for children to write as a preparatory process to entry to the primary school. In Stella's view, expressed earlier, when the curricular approach of the preschool differs from that of the primary school, transition to primary school becomes problematic.

For Lenora, her curriculum emanated from the primary schools or her work context, and so required higher levels of performance. Regardless, she was sceptical that, despite the wide content coverage, there was a lack of continuity between what they taught at the preschool and what the children did at standard one. In her view, their efforts were wasted because the standard one teacher started over again, which was boring to the children:

[LE: Because this teaching that we teach and drill them, for the sake of them to go to standard one, And when they reach there, the teachers now start teaching this child a e i o u and the child relaxes and says that this is what we have been taught in nursery school][LE01B: 402-414]

Pritchett (2006), that teachers felt kindergarten to be more like first grade used to be. However, unlike some teachers in Parker and Neuharth-Pritchett's (2006) study, who felt that their liaison with their grade one counterparts set the expectations right, thereby reducing pressure related to transition requirements, teachers in this study did not think that such communication was possible, albeit they felt it desirable. Neuman (2005:191) notes that pedagogical continuity ensures continuity between preschools and primary

schools, when teachers harmonize their philosophies and expectations for children. Stella's comments reinforce the need for such continuity. She noted:

[ST: Eeh, I could be suggesting that there could be a dialogue between this [Tumaini] and [Naet primary school] especially with the lower teachers...yah, lower teachers ee. They should be considering those ee, areas whereby if a child has difficulties they should consult the teacher, so that the teacher can present fully how this child was, what was the problem, because there are problems which can make a child be a failure and maybe she is not a failure...][ST03:87-89-2]

Research suggests that curriculum decisions that originate from parents' needs, national curriculum and policies at the local level, limit kindergarten teachers' autonomy in curriculum implementation (Kim *et al.*, 2005:55; Jambunathan & Caulfield, 2006:256; Wong, 2003:50), as it also influences what areas Kindergarten teachers focus on (Kowalski *et al.*, 2005:38; Maxwell *et al.*, 2001:443; Miller & Smith 2004:122). Transition requirements determine teacher focus (David *et al.*, in Miller & Smith, 2004:123,126; Maxwell, 2001:443; Parker & Neuharth-Pritchett, 2006:71; Stipek, 2004:562), and differences in values between DAP approaches and social realities are in conflict with each other, in cases where didactic instruction is preferred (Jambunathan & Caulfield, 2006:256; McMullen *et al.*, 2005:453-4).

For Stella and Enid, conflicts between reality and policy, or lack of it, entrench in them a belief that children need exposure to writing and task completion, to fit into the non-Montessori primary schools. They believe that a DAP pedagogy at the preschool should prepare children to fit into the primary school. Lenora's concern about continuity between preschool and the primary school transition requirements reflect a conclusion by Timperley *et al.* (2003:32), that there is a need for school and kindergarten teachers to collaborate to enhance continuity for children's transition between the two environments. Such collaboration ensures that teachers equip children only with skills necessary for a smooth transition.

Besides the perceived difference in transition requirements, Stella and Enid suggested that parents who enrol their children in Montessori preschools do not understand the application of Montessori principles. In their view, when parents lack such knowledge, they make demands contrary to the approach; such as demands for written work, even among the three-year-olds who have not yet reached the writing developmental level.

Enid concurred with Stella, that Montessori curriculum was slow in the context of the requirements to prepare children for mainstream schooling:

[ST: okay, it is must to do class work [skills-based]... you know with Montessori, they value a lot on activities, but you can continue to say I am a Montessori directress. If I go on sitting with all types of materials of Montessori, maybe at the end of the day, a parent will come, and wants to know, is my child writing, can I see her books or his books? So, we cannot concentrate only on those activities [materials]. We have to give limit so that we can have time to do class work][ST01:167-171]

[EN: ... if it is a Montessori school, they know they will do well, that is what they believe, but they don't know the procedure in which the school goes through to make that child do well they don't know. What they want to know is to see is that my child can write and can read....: Mmh, you know the only thing they are always worried about is for their child to go may be primary school, a good primary school][EN04:303-311-1]

[EN: Because most of them (parents), they say Montessori method, it is a slow method, and they want their children to write ...][EN04:301]

Wong (2003:50) concludes from a study of teachers using the 'project approach' that teachers feel frustrated when their teaching approach is not appreciated or understood in the context of implementation, or when they cannot implement their curriculum as they understand it. The sentiments of Enid and Stella reflect a frustration that parents might not understand the Montessori teaching approach. The teachers' frustrations and sentiments reflect on what they perceive as a competitive school environment, which required academic skills teaching involving many workbooks and academic skills teaching at the expense of using the Montessori materials. In the next section, a discussion of their concerns in relation to this theme follows.

6.5 COMPETITIVE SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT

[LE: If the children do not make to standard one, we shall loose children. Because the parents see the school, that does well [in the interview] or the school that takes more children to standard one...][LE01A:700-708; LE01B:320-334]

[ST: 'Montessori, we are even straining a lot with mathematics especially, reading is okay...the reading is there, in a Montessori a child must read [ST03:800-812-01]

[EN: Okay, so according to me the environment here...is totally different from the one in Tumaini] because there they just insist on somebody to pass... [in skills-based subject][EN04:205-207-01]

[BE...yea sometimes it's too early [for children to write] but...it is the way in preschools ... because competition is very high, so... so we have to introduce to them so that your children can fit... [To the school demands of the environment][BE01:204-220]

Belinda's comments suggest that the focus on skills-based teaching reflects what goes on in other preschools within the environment, when she reiterates that '*it is the way in preschools*'. It also suggests that she holds herself responsible for preparing children to 'fit' with the requirements of school transition. Belinda's comments reflect Lenora's sentiment that their environment is competitive, and yet a school's enrolment⁴¹ reflects on the general perception held by parents, such that the higher a school's enrolment, the better the rating of the school in the parents' view. Both Lenora and Belinda embrace a 'personal self efficacy' principle (Ashton *et al.*; Gins *et al.*, both in McMullen, 1999), that predisposes them to work towards a positive outcome that they attribute to their efforts, as when "your children can fit" according to Belinda's comments. It is not surprising that both DICECE teachers perceived a 'competitive school environment', which Lenora attributed to the practices in private schools. She suggested that teachers in public schools⁴² must prepare their children to compete equally with those from private schools:

[LE: These days we find that the competition is, too high,... we are forced to go by time, because we find these private schools, they want to teach beyond][LE01A:646-656; 658]

[LE: and those schools in town [private schools] they [colleagues] get papers from those schools and they find some work that we have never even come across one time. They bring them and that teacher will assist the rest, saying there is some work here let us teach the children...][LE01B:320-334]

[ST: '...us here, we are teaching a lot of things'][ST03:800-808-01; 812-01]

Although Stella and Enid linked their beliefs to a competitive environment, they focused more on the disjuncture between the Montessori curriculum and the primary school transition. Stella contrasted her previous work experience in two other school settings⁴³ to her experience at Tumaini:

[ST: Because let me say for example, me when I started my T.P (teaching practice) in [sic another school with primary attached], eeh, we were teaching children, em and the children were going to the same school, where the nursery was whereby I can say eeh is very much different with here in Tumaini. Because when us here at [Tumaini] we are teaching children a lot of things even apart from that of Montessori we are even straining a lot with mathematics especially, reading is okay... the reading is there, in a Montessori a child must read][ST03:800-808-01; 812-01]

⁴¹ The Montessori preschools usually hold a prestigious position in Kenya, charging higher fees than DICECE preschools (see chapter three for the difference in fees charged by the two schools). Besides, in the study context, the Montessori preschool has a higher pupil enrolment than the DICECE preschool.

⁴² Their DICECE is more or less a public preschool because it receives direct financial support from the University by employment of teachers although parents subsidize through fees payment.

⁴³ Stella had been to three schools that are located in relatively rural settings.

From her comments, Stella believed that the current University environment, regardless of an expectation that parents be more enlightened about child development, would pressurize them to engage children in written tasks.

[ST: But, I found that for example when I was in [another preschool attached to a Primary school] [em we would only teach a child to know numbers 1-20 do an exam of, do exams of addition and subtraction ...eh and Kiswahili was not so much pressurized in learning, like here in [Tumaini]... Eeh, because you see here in [Tumaini] you have to teach numbers even up to hundred (100) ...Take away all sums vertically and horizontally, reading both Kiswahili and English, fluently, Like, things like sentence...us we never teach sentences in [former school], even in [X] [another school]. ST: But we taught the children to read, yes, but simple words like, book, tree][ST03:814-826-01]

Lenora corroborated Stella's concern that currently they were responding to the stiff competition by teaching beyond the preschool requirements. She said:

[LE: This time [sic currently] the child has to read... Sentences even the difficult sentences that the lower primary school children cannot read... Yah (pause) so we are forced to teach them to teach them to the extent of the child reading even the difficult sentences... because we have what I told you look and read...the child has to (pause) see, we have to introduce them for example them][LE01A:732-740]

To respond to the competition Lenora suggested that she schemes were beyond the preschool curriculum, in what she called 'own collection'. She used this term to refer to extra work that teachers accumulate from their colleagues from other schools⁴⁴. By so doing, they broaden their scope of coverage, in anticipation of competing favourably. About her own collection, she said:

[LE: We scheme even to our own our own collection. Yah, to our own collection, even the work that we don't find in our eeh (pause) this in these books in our curriculum... because of this competition that is going on][LE01A:67-674]

Scheming to 'their own collection' beyond their preschool curriculum is a good way to keep informed about what goes on in the surrounding environment, only if it relates to training and qualification of the teacher. However, the teachers were accessing, through their colleagues, a curriculum higher than their training. As earlier mentioned, this raises the question of how qualified the preschool teachers might be to teach a curriculum that went beyond their training level. It also introduces variability in schools on how they

⁴⁴ Lenora and Enid mentioned one good performing school in town during our discussion as their point of reference to competition.

prepare their children to transition beyond nursery school, as this will depend on the preponderance of the teachers to seek information.

Lenora suggested that the high population of nursery school children competing for standard one admission to the only public primary school in this context had influenced their inclusion of *'their own collection'*, so that they could equip children for success. Lenora introduced another concept into the preschool curriculum, which had implications for the competency of the teachers to implement, as well as the use of children's time. Her mention of their inclusion of the teachers' own collection, while it allows for flexibility and perhaps a wide scope approach to the curriculum, could also diminish children's playtime. Moreover, such *'alien curriculum'* could strain both the teachers and the children, because while it may increase the scope of content coverage, it was not yet subjected to professional censorship, for its suitability to the preschool.

Lenora, Enid and Stella believed that the demands for children to learn academics in current environment were higher than the provisions for preschool education. The perceived demands to prepare children to cope with a competitive school environment are open to several possible interpretations. Firstly, since this is a University environment, where teachers expect most of the parents to be knowledgeable about school performances, this predisposes them to attribute expectations for good performance to parents, unlike if the teachers taught in a typical rural preschool. Secondly, it is possible that these 'educated' parents, some without knowledge of DAP, might expect to see their children writing and reading. It is also possible that teachers will want to prove that children attending their schools are capable of academic tasks, which the Kenyan society can readily assess, such as through the interview or as children appear articulate in spoken language, at the expense of using play that might not be readily assessed. In my view, this perceived pressure to compete favourably or to gain favour from parents is the reason the teachers introduced children, including 4-year-olds, to early writing. Lenora's comment illustrates this view:

[LE: Yah we scheme them as teachers' own collection...the work that is in our curriculum books, the work is too shallow...][LE01B:282-300]

Although Lenora and Belinda were concerned about the pressure and competition from private schools, as a factor influencing their curriculum approach, Lenora's position did not depict a consciously compelled position, but rather, the teachers' own prerogative to

scale up the preschool curriculum. This reflects a conclusion by Mwaura *et al.* (2008:238), that there are some sought-after schools in Kenya. Some stakeholders have alleged that private schools drill learners to pass examinations at the expense of actual teaching, where children ought to learn. This is a contentious issue for all stakeholders at all levels of education, from preschool to secondary school. This concern has been specific to private schools, with some alleging that private school children do not make the grade, when admitted into public secondary school, because they lack the luxury of individual attention that they enjoy in private primary schools.

However, the ‘sought after’ school phenomenon is understood from the overall framework for education provision in Kenya. Parents want to enrol their children in primary schools that are not overcrowded, and that ensure optimal levels for learning for their children. Such schools also fall within the category of the public-funded, but appear to run autonomously, independently of government policies. For example, while the government policy is explicit that no interviews shall be used to admit children to standard one (Republic of Kenya, 2006a), these ‘semi autonomous’ public primary schools, without an explicit source of their autonomy, still use interviews to admit pupils. Mwaura *et al.*’s (2008) notion of the sought-after schools also links to the overcrowding observed in some public schools. Currently the teacher-pupil ratio is between 1:47 and 1:40, while the textbook to pupil ratio is 1:3 (Republic of Kenya, 2007:99-100).

6.6 PEER INFLUENCE TO DIVERSIFY APPROACH

[EN: ‘You see if the other teacher is using this writing over...I should also use writing over’]
[EN04:263]

[LE: Maybe I know something that the other teacher does not know][LE01B: 282- 300]

[ST: Mmmh, another influence is also may be from the colleagues..[Explaining an approach to teach addition].. So, automatically we saw that was a very good way of making children understand quickly and a short way of doing math][ST03:442-01; ST03:578-01]

Each of the three teachers who mentioned influence by colleagues also emphasized certain factors. For Enid, it depicted pressure when fellow teachers use a different approach to teach concepts, resulting in a non-Montessori approach, and differential content coverage, which might be of concern to parents. It appeared to her, that when teachers in the same school use divergent approaches, it undermined both the Montessori

curriculum and attention to individual differences. She believed that she should match her methods with the other teachers in the same school, even if she may not agree:

[EN: That is where you will find things difficult so you have to go together if that teacher uses “nini” may be writing over and writing over then I will have to use writing over][EN04:263]

Lenora and Stella suggested that their exposure to interactions with fellow teachers who had previous variable approaches and content coverage helped them adopt the methods that in their view had been beneficial to them. Teacher nuances resonated with those of one of the teachers in Goldstein’s (2007b) study who was surprised to find early childhood setting focusing on materials she had developed were rendered useless by the approach used in the setting in which she worked.

Kostelnik *et al.* (2004:325) highlight this divergent and rather confusing approach to teaching within the same school as an issue that requires redressing. They summarize their view of the conflict in what might reflect a contrasting approach for new teachers entering the profession who find conflicts on methods that are familiar to them as to how to teach emerging literacy. Authors suggest that school and social forces influence teachers’ views of readiness (Graue, in Lin & Gorell, 2003:226; Schoonmaker & Ryan, in Cassidy & Lawrence, 2000:194).

6.7 PERCEIVED LACK OF TIME

This theme was explicit in our discussion about the silence of materials and why the teachers did not engage children with the materials nor create opportunities for them for free play. The context of non-use of materials should guide the interpretation of the following sentiments.

[ST: ‘Yea, but you see, time does not allow you to follow each and everything...so you have to use the material that you see they are very quick, not to waste a lot of time][ST01:231- 245]

LE: they might be reading, yah they get eeh, because in the morning only that hour is not enough for them [to do oral work] in the afternoon they get the chance to read now to read again...so, this afternoon hour now the oral work...they will be reading everything anything the vowels, Kiswahili...all those things][LE02:577-601]

[EN: so you discover that most of the materials we use in Montessori because they are slow you go on a slow pace, you cannot just go that fast... we have to put them aside.][EN02:424; 456; 458; EN04:225-1]

One of the factors, which Stella and Enid believed impinged on their implementation of a Montessori curriculum, was lack of time. For Lenora who is DICECE trained, she noted that due to a wide content coverage, she created more time for children to do oral work in the afternoons. Consequently, these teachers were under pressure to cover certain content areas, due also to what they called “the environment”. Interestingly, in what contradicts her general view, Stella suggested that children were wasting time if they used the Montessori materials. Stella could only be selective about the material to use. According to her, such materials were those that she could use *quickly*:

[ST... No we don't [use materials], let me be sincere anyway][ST01:203-209]

[ST: Okay, there is this problem also, our schools in these our environments is half day, not a full day. If it were a full day, we could do everything, both...we anticipate a lot of problems because as far as we may deal with these materials, maybe one material has a lot of stages, one two three, four, even to six. So if you deal with the same materials maybe one to six, maybe the whole term will finished... so you have to limit][ST01:231-245]

Stella believed that the Montessori approach required more time than was currently available. In her view, if the Montessori were a full day preschool, the problem of rushing through the day would be solved. However, her perception was that whole-day kindergarten would facilitate their application of the Montessori curriculum but negatively affect children’s social and emotional functioning. Studies of effects of centre-based care on children show that long hours of centre-based care improve their cognitive-linguistic functioning, but children expressed more negative social- emotional behaviours after long hours in centre-based care (NICHD, in Belsky, 2006:106). Lenora summarized her current concerns about the changing requirements in kindergarten:

[LE: A long time ago,... children were...we were not allowed to teach the children the words... We are... we are forced to go by time... we find these private schools they want to teach beyond' [LE01A:646-259]

Perceived lack of time as a factor influencing teachers’ beliefs adds to the findings by Wang *et al.* (2008:244) that their Chinese sample felt that their practices did not reflect their beliefs due to time limitations.

6.8 CONCLUSION: FACTORS INFLUENCING TEACHERS' BELIEFS ABOUT DAEP

Several factors influence teachers' beliefs use of developmentally appropriate practice. Each of these embraced the concerns held by the teachers about *transition, perceived lack of time, pushed-down curriculum, and fear of reduced school enrolment*. Most of the factors, as discussed in this section, however, are located beyond the teacher's sphere of influence. In the following chapter, I relate the teachers' concerns to the larger social system through a bio-ecological systems theoretical framework.

For example, among the Montessori teachers, there is a need to prepare children to transition to a non-Montessori primary school, contributing to their focus on a subject-based, teacher-directed approach. Since each of the four teachers takes children from baby through to the senior class before they present them for the interview, they wish for an early start for their group of children, as their performance reflects on teacher competence. Expressing her amazement at the consequences if the children failed the interview, Stella said:

[ST: Aii, Wa' wa' wa, ' wa' wa, I hope it won't happen, Okay, it can happen but it has not happened... that will be chaos now because I don't think now unless there is a problem. I think if the children fail, that means sacking][ST03:334; 338-02; 356; 358-02]

Stella suggested that her colleagues from other schools had influenced the way she taught. This indicates that educational practices are porous, and being affected by external influences. In this case, the external influences on teaching practices of other schools and teachers have infiltrated to this preschool through colleague interactions. Teachers' beliefs are entrenched in their experience (Schoonmaker & Ryan; Katz, both in Cassidy & Lawrence, 2000:193-4; Lightfoot & Valsiner, in Cuskelly & Detering, 2003:45). The teachers' interactions among each other have contributed to their varying the curriculum. Stella's comments capture the influence from colleagues in her sentiments:

[ST in the field ...you meet with so different teachers, from different may be schools or different colleges. You acquire those things because eeh the little she and another teacher has when you combine...you find that it brings a bit big wider...teaching environment...other than that of college...whereby you are only on college things, making materials, no teaching][ST03:454-464-01]

From the foregoing discussion, teachers in the study feel compelled to respond to a number of pressure sources, which include: preparing children to fit in a non-Montessori curriculum; responding to parents concerns; community pressure from competitive school environment; and perceived lack of time, all of which have affected their use of DAP approaches. This study echoes previous findings that teachers respond to parents' pressure by increasing children's homework, giving more academic-oriented work and teaching directly, even when they disapprove of such measures (Stipek & Byler, 1997:317), and that children's literacy experiences were affected by perceived external pressure (Miller & Smith, 2004). In addition, what transpires at the preschool is the result of many factors, including:

Knowledge of the principles of child development, parents' goals, expectations, aspirations, their understanding and preferences with respect to appropriate experiences for their children...what teachers are willing or able to do...teachers may be willing to implement some practices, but for a variety of reasons, may be unable it do so and vice versa (Katz, 1995:100).

These sources of influence on teachers' beliefs, suggested by previous scholars, agree with what the teachers discussed in the current study. From their sentiments, they were responding to, as well as creating, circumstances that favoured their continued employment. This is consistent with the findings of Wang *et al.* (2008:144), that the Chinese sample attributed the disparity between beliefs and practices to the pressure to align their beliefs to the directors' beliefs, their experience and government regulations. However, Wang *et al.* (2008:243) report that American teachers in their study were likely to consider children's needs when they plan for teaching, while Chinese teachers consider practical limitations, such as limitation of resources and government regulation. Generally, the focus on skills-based teaching contradicts the findings by Kowalski *et al.* (2001:9), that teachers prioritized language and socio-emotional skills. Kowalski *et al.* (2005:38) conclude that teachers tend to focus on 'teaching to the test', mainly on those areas that common assessment tools test. But, Trawick-Smith (2003:199; 348) cautions that schooling experiences vary remarkably from one society to another, depending on

the expectations of the wider society, and the ‘cultural’ wiring for activity among children. In the next chapter, I consider the findings of the study within a framework of bio-ecological systems theory.



A brief sojourn after voyage six

As we explored the sixth leg of this voyage,

*I showed you how I got answers to the questions on the factors
influencing teachers’ beliefs...*

We heard teachers mention;

Responding to pressure from parents...

Preparation for the interviews

Different transition curriculum

Competitive school environment

Peer influence and

Perceived lack of time...

*In the next part of the voyage, I take you through a
synthesis of the whole journey...*



VOYAGE SEVEN PUTTING THE PUZZLE PIECES OF THE JOURNEY TOGETHER



Coming up in voyage seven

*As we begin the journey into voyage seven, we shall link the data into
the DAP framework ...*

*As we scale the heights of academia, we shall link teachers' beliefs and
children's educational experiences to their social-cultural
context...*

*And as we come to the end of this journey, I propose a seesaw model to
help interpret preschool teachers' beliefs and children's
educational experiences.*

Join me now in this theoretical journey...

7.1 INTRODUCTION

Developmental theories and research are shaped by value systems, philosophical mindsets, and historical circumstances within specific cultures' but are necessary to interpret [and] assess relevance of current practices in Sub-Saharan Africa (Pence & Marfo, 2008:83).

This chapter is an attempt to discuss and overlay the research findings to the theoretical framework on preschool teachers' beliefs of developmentally appropriate educational practices. To achieve this aim, I will first summarize the findings to the DAP framework, highlighting examples from across the cases, before I link the emerging themes to the various levels of the bioecological systems theory. Even more, an overarching intellectual concern is to provide, within the contextual dynamics of preschool education in the Kenya, a meta-theoretical link between the bioecological theory and the dynamics of ECD in the Kenyan context. In the second part of the chapter, I introduce the seesaw model, which might help various societies to understand and define what is developmentally appropriate for their children. Therefore, the DAP principles framework (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997; Kostelnik, *et al.*, 2004; Rushton & Larkin, 2001; NAEYC, 1997; 2009), and the bioecological systems theory will guide the discussion (Bronfenbrenner, 1972; 1979; 2005; Bronfenbrenner & Evans, 2000; Swick & Williams, 2006).

7.2 THE DAP FRAMEWORK

Although the twelve principles of DAP will be highlighted, only those that feature in the study will guide this discussion. Consequently, I discuss these twelve principles under three broad categories: consideration of children's unique way of learning; consideration of the type of the learning environment; and consideration of home or school relationships. Although the three levels and categories of DAP might appear distinct, it is essential to note that they interrelate to explain best practices for optimum child development.

As an illustration of how the DAP levels interrelate, in Belinda's class there was a child called Chepchirchir⁴⁵, who seemed to display variable ways of relating to her learning environment. This girl had her way, and was less emotionally mature, as she was not yet

⁴⁵ This is a pseudonym for this girl. See vignette four in chapter five for more details.

socialized to routine and turn-taking. Although Chepchirchir was yet to develop social competence to cope with her learning tasks, Belinda accommodated her by getting her occupied, even if in a different activity, so that she did not interrupt the flow of the activity with which the children were currently engaged. Even in instances that Chepchirchir interrupted learning, Belinda gently held her hand and diverted her interest to another activity. Belinda understood that this child was an orphan, having got the information from the guardian, and that her need for an emotionally secure learning environment was a priority. In this example, all levels A, B, and C consolidate how Belinda might have embraced a DAP approach to interact with Chepchirchir. Kostelnik *et al.* (2004: 16-16) and NAEYC (1997:4-5; 2009:9-10) summarize the three levels under which the twelve principles fall, as illustrated by figure 44 (below).

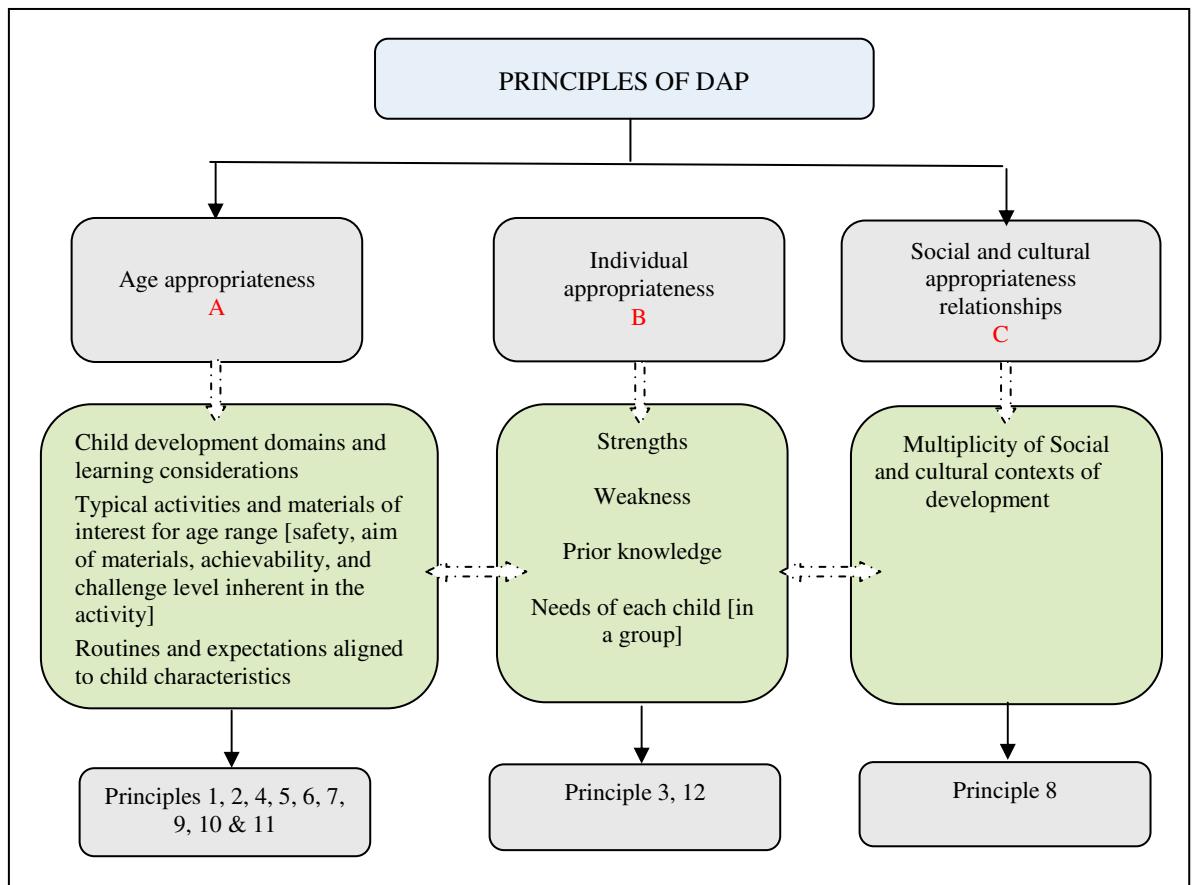


FIGURE 44: Three levels of summarised DAP principles

7.2.1 CONNECTING TEACHERS' BELIEFS TO DAP PRINCIPLES

To emphasize the uniqueness of childhood, Kostelnik *et al.* (2004:17) maintain, “we as educators must recognise the unique way in which children are children, not miniature adults”. This statement summarizes the generally agreed upon position that childhood is a period when children display certain dispositions related to their ages, such as the preponderance to curiosity about the surrounding environment, and the urge to use their bodies to learn (Mallaguzi, 1998; Seefeldt & Wasik, 2006; Sroufe *et al.*, 1996). This principle proposes an interface between the developmental domains of an individual (cognitive, social, emotional and physical), and the sequential order of development, in incremental parts. In addition, it also proposes that earlier experiences have snowballing effects on later development, and that a child’s current abilities can be the basis upon which to predict their overall rate of development, although variable rates might occur from one domain to another. For example, a child’s physical precocity might translate to social development.

The assumption that children are active learners who require tangible experiences to engage their senses, to develop within the limits of their biological and environmental factors through play-based opportunities, are all factors to consider in planning for a DAP curriculum (Crowther & Wellhousen, 2004:187; Gallagher, 2005:18; Kostelnik *et al.*, 2004:46; 49; Seefeldt & Wasik, 2006:89; Smidt, 2006:54). Consequently, the DAP principles are assumed to form the basis of the theories of child development, upon which early childhood teacher training courses are based, because the principles have a theoretical and conceptual backing (Bredenkamp & Copple, 1997; Kontos and Dunn, 1993:54-5; Kostelnik *et al.*, 2004; Stipek, 1993:32; NAEYC, 1997; NAEYC, 2009). Following is an illustration of how teachers’ emerging beliefs extrapolate to these principles.

7.2.2 PRINCIPLE 1: DOMAINS OF CHILD DEVELOPMENT ARE ENTWINED

The first principle states: “All the domains of development and learning-physical, social and emotional, and cognitive-are important, and they are closely 8nterrelated. Children’s development and learning in one domain influence and are influenced by what takes place in other domains” (NAEYC, 1997: 2009:11)

The interrelationship in the ‘domains of development’ principle suggests that various domains of development such as cognitive, social, emotional and physical development exist in harmony with each other (Bredenkamp & Copple, 1997; Rushton & Larkin, 2001:28; Kostelnik *et al.*, 2004:41; NAEYC, 1997; Sroufe *et al.*, 1996). Belinda, Lenora and Stella corroborated the ‘whole child philosophy’ view as follows:

[BE: These pictures make the class look attractive, the children like things that are bright, bright... And they learn names of the pictures ...there you will give the children moulding [play dough] and then they discover by themselves. You will find some of them making letters... some of them making many things they see at home; it co-ordinates (pause)...the hands and an indirect preparation for writing ...it makes the muscles stronger...] [BE01: 370-374; 457; 459;463;465]

[LE: You know sometime a child comes from home, when the child doesn't have moods to learn; during the indoor free choice activities...this child will interact with others... When the hand is put in paint and the child prints on a paper, the child will be very happy. Even by the end of the day when they reach home, they tell their parents I have really done some good work you will come and see my work][LE01B: 82; 84; 86; 88; 632-634]

[ST: Eeh, whereby I find eeh using this material is quite, a good method because as a child sees, feels, and does whatever she/her is doing with the material] [ST03:306-01]

Both Lenora and Belinda linked children’s learning to their emotional states. For Belinda, the emotional effects of colour illustrate her class full of animated months of the year and days of the week, because “children like bright things”. She also linked the children’s play with playdough to their preparation for writing, because playing with the dough strengthens the muscles. Lenora linked the emotional state of the child (“doesn’t have moods”) to their readiness to participate in the learning activities. In her view, such indoor free play as part of the schedules in the morning would help the child to ease into learning, as it also provides the opportunity to interact with others. Notwithstanding the silencing of materials, Lenora articulated the value of free play as part of a holistic approach to develop the child. Stella appreciated the holistic approach to children’s learning through a simultaneous engagement of their senses, as the child “sees, feels, and does whatever...with the materials”. Evidently, the teachers articulated the value of this principle in children’s holistic development.

According to the principle of ‘interrelated domains’, children’s learning should incorporate many dimensions of the domains at the same time, while encouraging teachers to beware that all the senses of the child, sight, smell, taste, touch and hearing, are avenues to learning (Rushton & Larkin, 2001:28). A child’s motor development

(such as in writing), and reading, which is cognitive, might be interrelated (Graves; Adams; Weaver; all in Rushton & Larkin, 2001:28). Consequently, reading and writing are entwined as both require the child's visual acuity (which is a physical ability), in addition to letter recognition and word recognition (as a mental processes) (Rushton & Larkin, 2001:28). Kostelnik *et al.* (2004:41) argue that educators should concern themselves with the whole child, in "whole child philosophy". Miles and Stipek (2006) demonstrate that positive social skills in kindergarteners and grade one children predicted better literacy achievement, concluding that considering the whole child philosophy is beneficial to child development. NAEYC (2009:11) state that "children are thinking, moving, feeling and interacting human beings", and that their educational activities should embrace the interrelated domains of the child's development.

7.2.3 PRINCIPLE 2 & 6: DOMAINS OF CHILD DEVELOPMENT ARE SEQUENTIAL WITH LATER ABILITIES BEING MORE COMPLEX

The second and sixth principles closely interrelate. Therefore, the discussion juxtaposes the two. The second principle states that *'many aspects of children's learning and development follow well documented sequences, with later abilities, skills and knowledge building on those already acquired'* (NAEYC, 2009:11)

The sixth principle states that *"development proceeds towards greater complexity, self-regulation, and symbolic or representational capacities"* NAEYC (1997: 2009: 12).

All the teachers emphasized the role of predictability of the direction of learning, even within their teaching. According to them, a child's entry behaviour determines their future learning capability. Moreover, future work builds on the present abilities of the child to complete certain tasks. For example, teacher Stella noted that if a child were quick in grasping certain concepts in one area, such a child would quickly grasp concepts in other areas. Enid, Belinda and Lenora embraced the principle of cumulative effects of children's prior experiences, and how it explains children's learning:

[EN: ...we take every child according to how they have been doing their work. Maybe this one was fast enough in learning sounds, so introducing letters to that child is much easier. [EN0:26; 64-68]

[BE: '[Yaani (that is), you just look at how the child will do his work- if he doesn't do well, next time, you will just write for him/her a single letter; And the one who can write, you just write] [BE: 168- 170]

7.2.4 PRINCIPLE 3: CONSIDERATION FOR VARIABILITY IN CHILDREN'S IN LEARNING

The third principle states: “*Development and learning proceed at varying rates from child to child as well as at uneven rates across different areas of a child's individual functioning*” NAEYC (1997: 6; 2009:11).

In the study, the teachers rhetorically articulated their belief about children's uniqueness⁴⁶, noting that it was a consideration in their plan to consider children's variability: All the teachers acknowledged children's individuality:

[ST: As far as I am concerned, I know that in a class that all the children cannot be on the same ability][ST03:48-60-03]

[EN: ...when you take that course [early childhood] you have to understand a kid, that is the first thing. You know the weaknesses of the kid, you know what the kid likes, what he doesn't like. We have some kids, they can't listen, they are very playful...you just have to understand them first...You know what they want, what they don't like, and what they like doing mostly when they are in class...we have those children who are fast, and we have those who are slow learner][EN0:26; 64-68]

[BE: It depends also with the child; there are some children, who are quick learners, and there are others who are slow. So maybe you cannot introduce something as early as possible but you can get that they cannot cope up with that work, until, maybe he is older] [BE01: 249-253]

[LE: Yah, as a preschool teacher handles such a child..., most of my time I concentrate on them [children with slow tempo] because the fast learners I just introduce and they do the work. Even within ten minutes. That fast learner will have finished every work and is bored so the other one might even take three hours before even doing the work even three sums or writing for example now the changing, they have even changed two words [LE02:346]

All the teachers emphasized children's diversity in their personality, learning tempo, activity level and their intellectual ability. Enid included children's interests as part of their diversity. Through differentiated tasks, Stella and Belinda tried to embrace the children's ability level. In addition, consideration for children's sociability expressed during choral sessions, which in some instances was a voluntary activity. This might have embraced children's interest and ability.

However, as discussed, Lenora and Enid did not give different copying and task-completion activities to reflect children's individual differences. On many occasions, choral reading was a rotational activity⁴⁷. Considering similar academic skills for task completion for the five-year-olds, the compulsory rotational choral reading might not

⁴⁶ I discuss this theme on children's individuality/variability in voyage five.

⁴⁷ See section 5.3.2 in voyage five for the discussion on choral activities.

reflect sensitivity to children's differential abilities and interests. Therefore, in all the cases, teachers believed that children had individual differences but did not seem to embrace them in planning for educational experiences. For example, despite pro-individual beliefs the teachers delivered lessons using a schedule. Even when they differentiated tasks for copying, teachers expected children to complete the tasks on schedule. Therefore, although the teachers tried to articulate differentiated tasks for the children as a measure of variability, they did not consider children's variable tempos.

One of the significant themes that run across the literature in early childhood is that children differ from one another in their learning dispositions. Consequently, such individuality should guide teachers as they plan for their learning activities (Jalongo *et al.*, 2004:144; Klein & Chen, 2001:17; MacNaughton & Williams, 2004:46; Seefeldt & Wasik, 2006; Sroufe *et al.*, 1996; Warner & Sower, 2005). DAP embraces the principle that each child is unique in their learning (Bredenkamp & Copple, 1997; Kostelnik, 2004:147).

However, in this study, teachers were more concerned to create similarity than diversity, suggesting that they were under pressure to bring all children on par in their school work, which negates the principle of individual differences. From the broader social context of the study, the general thinking reinforces *similarity* rather than *difference* among community members. This 'corporate' thinking originates from the *social psyche*, reinforcing 'we'-ness' rather than the 'I'-ness' in early childhood experiences. With reference to development of early childhood infrastructure, Adams and Swadener (2000) suggest that the communal psyche exists among the Kenya community, especially when it comes to pulling resources together [originating from harambee philosophy], so that everyone can have something. Although this observation link with sharing resources, this philosophy might influence the parents' expectations. The teachers emphasized this 'corporate thinking' among parents.

A similar conclusion about how social values contrast with some of the DAP principles emerges from observations of oriental contexts, such as China, where the influence of Confucianism and the one child-policy influence Chinese education (Vaughan, in Pang & Richey, 2007:2). This in agreement with conclusions from other oriental studies (Jambunathan & Caulfield, 2006; Kwon, 2004; Wang *et al.*, 2008), in which teachers focus on academic skills rather than emotional, social, and creative development. This

contrasts with experiences in the USA, which emphasize individuality, autonomy, creativity, free play and self-chosen activities (Tobin *et al.*; McAdoo; both cited by Pang and Richey, 2007:5).

Although there are inter-cultural differences in the emphasis on aspects of child development, such conclusions are tentative, as Maccoby and Lewis (2003) suggest. Examples from Lewis and Tobin *et al.* (cited in Maccoby & Lewis, 2003), and Tobin *et al.*, cited by Smidt (2007:63) contrasts the USA's emphasis on academic over social development, with Japanese pre-elementary schools that are likely to devote more time to free play and less to academic work.

In other respects, apart from academic aspects, the cultural diversity in the social organisation and expectations between Japanese and North American cultures is observed by Hess *et al.* (in Sroufe, *et al.*, 1996:43), that conformity, rather than individual assertiveness, respect, agreeableness, emotional maturity, self-control and courtesy are highly valued in the Japanese culture. Jingbo and Elicker (2005:140) discuss how the Chinese paradigm of education focuses on transmission of knowledge and skills.

Such transmission paradigm seemed evident in the current study. Maybe as part of exercising their power and authority, the teachers approach to teaching and their class control skills were evident. From this study, as earlier noted, the children's level of order and obedience is commendable. This might also reflect on the cultural expectation that adult [teachers] are responsible to guide behaviour, as part of their social responsibility. Besides, the children in some classes seemed to comply all the time, verbalising little to the teacher about their learning tasks, especially during written task-based assignments. Consequently, in environments where obedience is a virtue, it might be difficult to distinguish between obedience and fear. Therefore, in the context of this study, considering the 'social nature' of the community expectation might explain why the principle of considering commonness, rather than individual strengths, might reflect the wider social expectations.

7.2.5 PRINCIPLE 4: BIOLOGICAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL EFFECTS OF DEVELOPMENT

The fourth principle states: "*Development and learning result from a dynamic and continuous interaction of biological maturation and experience*" (NAEYC, 1997:8; 2009:12).

The rest of the teachers except Stella did not articulate the principle that environment affects development. Stella observed that children from ‘staff area’ and rural area (Ref ST02: 27-37) have different levels of environmental stimulation that she considers while teaching. Lenora agreed that children who are restricted to socialise in the neighbourhood at home by their parents, get unlimited opportunities to socialize with their peers. She said:

[LE: During free play, the children socialize, because as I said, the children come from different now, background. Some children at their homes, are not allowed by their parents to play with the children of their neighbours, so when they come to school, the children are very happy, another one says I come from (mentions name of the village), when I go to place X (again mentions name of the village), I do this and that][LE01:34-02]

The teachers’ comments that relate biological and environmental effects on the child’s development are anecdotal. Teachers did not articulate how biological or environmental factors interact to influence children’s development. They only mentioned the possible impact the interviews would have on the children’s performance in the interview if they did not teach them task-based assessment, which each teacher thought was an inevitable process of preparing the children for future learning at the primary school. The teachers mentioned the environment as determining their choices of what children learnt. For example, although Enid implied that she has the autonomy to re-schedule uncovered content, she felt constraint by other factors, such as the pressure to cope with other teachers in the same school to avoid disparity in content coverage, which might concern parents. She asked:

[EN: don’t you think that the parent who is in the other class will come and ask... why is it that my child is behind and yet the other child is a head of my child and yet they are in the same class] That is where you will find things difficult so you have to go together if that teacher uses “nini” may be writing over and writing over then I will have to use writing over][EN04:263]

7.2.6 PRINCIPLE 5: SNOWBALLING EFFECTS OF EARLIER EXPERIENCES

The fifth principle states: “*early experiences have profound effects, cumulative and delayed, on a child’s development and learning; and optimal periods exist for certain types of development and learning to occur*” (NAEYC 1997:6; 2009:12).

Perhaps the experiences of Jean Itard with *'the wild boy of Aveyron'* found at about age 12 abandoned in the Caune Woods in Paris, best illustrates the impact of environmental deprivation on an individual's development. Jean Itard (1962:6; 10) writes of the state of deprivation of the wild boy:

He was destitute of memory, of judgment, of aptitude of imitation...had an insurmountable aversion to society... [With] a tendency to trot and to gallop... is then probable that if at the time [of abandonment, estimated at four-five-year-old] he already owed some ideas and some words to the beginning of education, this would all have been effaced from his memory in consequence of his isolation.

Itard succinctly underscores, through his experiences with "Victor" (name given on his rehabilitation) to the difficulty with which to try to restore certain abilities once the critical period has lapsed. Itard tried to 'socialize' Victor's animal-like habits, but only to a certain level below the expected potential commensurate with age. He demonstrated the need to seize critical periods to develop certain human abilities, such as language. Montessori (1920:170) also subscribed to the window of opportunity theory when she recommended that a child's experience with materials "provokes auto education". The teachers commented:

[EN: and then we have those ones whom they were brought when they were over age. So their exploring time has already..., (pause) gone. Because if you bring a child with four plus ama (or) five years, in to baby class, four year, four plus, you will discover that they are reluctant, don't want to do anything, because their sensitive period had already passed. When they are three, you will discover that that is when the child wants to write and read (stress) all time all the time][EN01:396;398]

[ST: ... 'According to me the role of preschool is to prepare that child ...you know about the child if the child has disabilities or not so that ...as you are preparing this child to be the same with the others... I see that the preschool is so important for these kids, because they undergo that early stage whereby they have eeh their mind is absorbent mind][ST02:71]

[LE: 'I would wish that this child that who has not who will not be able to join standard one...if it was possible the child's parent should be called and explained that the child is not able [to perform]. Because if the child is taken to standard one...and that child will not be able to do the work in primary school... It will be a problem to that child even up to the secondary level] [LE02:731-737]

Enid echoed the observation of many scholars in early childhood, such as Katz (1995:106), that critical periods exist in the course of development, which resonates with those of Itard and Montessori, wherein, if the stimulation period of a child's interests for learning lapses, then it will be difficult to reverse the effects later (Sroufe *et al.*, 1996:83;229). Enid, Stella and Lenora appeared to subscribe to the 'window of

opportunity' principle too (Sorgen, in Rushton & Larkin, 2001:30). While Enid and Stella mentioned an 'absorbent mind' to the environmental stimuli, Lenora subscribed to the 'early intervention theory', without attributing it to any social background disadvantage (Fromberg, 2007:467; Penn, 2008:384; Republic of Kenya, 2006b:3; NAEYC, 1997; 2009), but rather to individual differences that might slow down the children's progress through school.

It appears that Lenora values the preschool years as a foundation for success in later school years, cautioning that when a child fails to cope with preschool activities, it will have long-term negative effects for their later schooling. Stella also suggested that when the teacher identifies learning differences early, especially during this period, it is possible to ameliorate learning difficulties associated with the disability. She cautioned that what the teacher did at the preschool would have long-term effects on the child's development. Her views corroborate my observation:

[ST: So you, you take time to prepare them knowing that those are absorbent minds, whatever you give them] [Should be correct because they will not, somebody else to change it, it will be difficult][ST02:73][ST02:71]

7.2.7 PRINCIPLE 7: CHILDREN NEED SECURE, CONSISTENT RELATIONSHIPS WITH ADULTS AND FELLOW CHILDREN

Principle seven states: "*children develop best when they have secure, consistent relationships with responsive adults and opportunities for positive relationships with peers*" (NAEYC, 1997:10; 2009:13).

Enid articulated the need for children to remain secure in their learning environment by her reference to one child. Lenora suggested that the free play opportunity for children in the morning gives them an opportunity to ease slowly into the learning activities. Otherwise, the other two teachers did not mention the issue of security for the children. Enid and Lenora said:

[EN: 'but it is only that, anything small which affects her, she cannot continue, that is anything which annoys her no matter how small it is she cannot do anything [EN02:278; 286]

[LE: 'the child will forget what happened may be on the way or from home. The child is brought to school the child is till crying maybe wants home, so this child in baby class needs a lot of play, and singing and yaani only socialize only with the environment and the rest of the children] [LE01B:100-4; 584-592]

However, although this principle did not feature prominently in the discussion, all the teachers periodically released the children to go to the toilet. It also appeared that as part of discipline and maybe respect for authority, any child had the opportunity to excuse him/herself through the teacher if there was need to go to the toilet arose. In addition, the children had opportunities for outdoor play, besides time to take their mid-morning snacks. This principle did not feature prominently in the teachers' discussion because security might not be a concern in this context. Moreover, issues relating to emotional expression were not appropriate in this context, where affection was not openly displayed. The teachers did not consider the security of the children in their classes as an issue because they did not perceive this context as emotionally or physically insecure.

7.2.8 PRINCIPLE 8: MULTIPLE SOCIAL AND CULTURAL INFLUENCES ON DEVELOPMENT AND LEARNING

The eight principle states: *“development and learning occur in and are influenced by multiple social and cultural contexts”* (NAEYC, 1997:7; 2009:12). *“What the communities believe is the correct way to work with children”* (Prochner *et al.*, 2008:189).

The teachers acknowledged the effects of the wider social context on the child's development. Lenora used the children's trip to Kisumu emphasized the role of children's experiences on development. According to her, this was an opportunity for children to relate their weekend experiences to learning. However, Lenora limited her argument to developing self-expression language skills and confidence in speech:

[LE:...they enjoy the experiences, drawing, socializing, yah part of learning, news telling... and that one will make the child to be very happy and to like school very much [LE01A:522-530; 536]
[ST: and relate them whereby they can see at home I always see maybe mother wearing necklaces or whatever and when he comes to school, we make sure that they don't find the school be so far much different than the things at home][ST03:760-01]

Stella acknowledged the role of the home environment in learning experience when she gave the children the opportunity to “thread beads”. In her view, the children should relate their learning experiences to their home experiences. The school and the church also play an active role in development. She also emphasized the need to articulate the

children's entry behaviour into their learning, when she said she ought to teach according to children's privileges and that she could not treat "children from the staff [University community] as those from the rural area". In her view, those from the rural areas were limited to exposure to media, such as the television; hence she would need to prop up her English language with action words, because in her own words, "children differ in their privileges". Belinda gave the children an opportunity to play using locally sourced materials. In her view, it was important so that the children could easily identify with the materials they saw at home. Both Belinda and Stella expressed their views about the multiple influences of the social and cultural background of the children:

[ST: 'if eeh this child comes, eeh lets say in a rural area, I will not ...deal with that child the same as the child who maybe is from the environment of the main campus or where he lives. ...are two different people. [The] one who is from the rural areas whereby they don't even talk English cannot even greet you in that language. So I have to see that if I am going to use the English eeh language... I have also to express it to the rest, maybe in Kiswahili... and action so that they can understand][ST02:27-37]

[BE: 'They also see the Omo tubs at home, so it is just the things they see. Maybe you would want to use the things they know better instead of bringing the things they have never seen...they will take interest to use it but if you bring something, they do not know they will not even touch it][BE01:70; 72; 74]

Although the teachers appreciated the multiplicity of the children's development contexts⁴⁸, they suggested that parents' concerns must also take precedence. In their view, the parents only got involved when their children failed to catch up academically. Stella, Lenora and Enid summarized the parent-school link in the following sentiments:

[ST: parent] does not understand eeh your curriculum or how you take steps with the teaching... Maybe if somebody brings a child to baby class after a week or at the end of the day he wants to see that, that the child already has written something, something on a book.][ST02:226-230]

[LE: 'you see, we normally tell these parents to be coming to school monthly...or any time they feel like, to come and check on the children's progress... we give them homework so that the child might be assisted at home, or when a here are those parents who do not see that the weakness is with the child. They see that maybe the weakness is with the teacher, so these parents end up...these parents, let's say if the child doesn't make... will lay the blame on the teacher...][LE01:108-118-02]

[EN: because most of them (sic parents), they say Montessori method, it is a slow method, and they want their children to write ...][EN04:301]

⁴⁸ See the discussion under principle three; section 7.2.3 for a discussion on how variable social expectations might impact in interpretations of children's educational experiences.

It is important to note that in the study context, parents rarely get involved in the classroom activities of their children or the school. Often school visits are on invitation or if they are concerned about their children's academic progress. Enid's comments showed a conflict in priority areas that originated from the parents. In this study, teachers perceived parents as interfering with their plan for children's educational experiences. Divergence in social expectations of the aims and practice of early childhood education were apparent.

7.2.9 PRINCIPLE 9: THE ASSUMPTION THAT CHILDREN ARE ACTIVE LEARNERS

The ninth principle states: *"Always mentally active in seeking to understand the world around them, children learn in a variety of ways; wide range of teaching strategies and interactions are effective in supporting all these kinds of learning"* (NAEYC, 1997:7; 2009:14)

The assumption that children are active learners recognizes that children need to engage actively with their environment as part of learning. We discussed this theme in relation to the teachers' beliefs about their use of learning materials⁴⁹. Although all the teachers perceived the use of materials favourably, apart from teacher Belinda, none of them engaged all the children in manipulatives. Lenora linked the children's involvement in learning to their enjoyment:

[LE: When the hand is put in paint and the child prints on a paper, the child will be very happy. Even by the end of the day when they reach home, they tell their parents I have really done some good work you will come and see my work][LE01B:632; 634]

[ST... You have to start with those activities so that you can know that maybe a child has a problem with some senses][ST02:106]

[BE: there you will give the children moulding and then they discover by themselves. You will find some of them making letters... some of them making many things they see at home; It coordinates (pause)...the hands and an indirect preparation for writing ...it makes the muscles stronger...] [BE01:457; 459;463;465]

[EN:Okay, it helps, at least to keep them to become independent and then movement of fingers] [EN04:12; 14-01]

⁴⁹ See voyage five, the theme on silencing of materials

Stella limited her perception of material's use to the identification of learning difficulties Belinda perceived materials manipulation as an opportunity for self-discovery, for children to link their school experience to what they saw at home and for them to develop their physical dexterity. Choral reading and written task-based assessments did not reflect a commitment to the principle that children are active learners, who need to explore their environment using all the senses. In our discussions, they limited the choral engagement as part of "being active", as suggested by some of their sentiments. For example, Lenora said

*LE: so if I take most of my time trying to teach saying do this, try this, does this....most of these, child (ren) will be bored and start to play....so I just introduce and then I give them now and I say they read in turns...the **child centred method** [meaning reading alone] that is used mostly so that child will enjoy learning][LE02:214-228]*

EN: If I decide to introduce, to use the material here I will drag behind because Montessori is a very slow method of teaching ...if I say that I am going to teach using the materials: I will drag behind; I will not introduce all the things that I am suppose to introduce ...we have to put them aside.][EN02:424; 456; 458; EN04:225]

Although the teachers articulated the importance of child engagement with play, their beliefs were higher than their practices⁵⁰. Overall, the teachers in this context believed that engaging children with materials slowed them down in their content coverage, as Enid's comments summarized the reservation to engage children with materials. Overall, they endorsed the use of materials or free play, a process that would engage learners, but they did not do so. The fact that children teachers did not give children the opportunity to play also might reflect the society's interpretation of play. In this context, play connoted 'doing nothing' or 'wasting time'. Often, children do not get such free time at homes where they are expected to do house chores (some as early as five-years-old), as part of responsibility development. Even if the child is doing a mundane task, such as sweeping the house or the earthen compound, or looking after calves, goats or sheep, this is a better 'play' than the unproductive type of play where there might not be tangible results.

7.2.10 PRINCIPLE 10: PLAY IS AN INTEGRAL PROCESS OF LEARNING

The tenth principle states: "*Play is an important vehicle for developing self-regulation as well as for promoting language, cognition and social competence*" (NAEYC, 1997:8; NAEYC, 2009:14).

⁵⁰ For a discussion of this observation, see the section on silencing of materials among three teachers in Voyage 5.

Smidt (2007:8-9) distinguishes the value of play for children that “what makes play is that it is something that the child has chosen to do...to follow his interest...carries no risk of failure”, and Sroufe *et al.* (1996:387) affirm that “play is the province of the child”. Froebel proposed “to receive the external world man has his senses...physical and sensory training is, therefore, important even in the early years” (in Lilley, 1967:102). Although children at the preschool ought to learn through play, except for the DICECE baby class, the three other classes did not provide opportunity for play among the children. In fact, what came across in our discussions of the use of play-based activities, teachers might have perceived play as perhaps incompatible with the pressure for academic tasks.

Therefore, the teachers seemed concerned that play activities were time-consuming. The Montessori teachers articulated the concern that they needed to prepare children to fit into a non-Montessori primary school. Hence, if they engaged the children with too many materials instead of work-based sheets, children might not be ready to transition to a non-Montessori primary school. Due to this concern, both Montessori teachers thought that the Montessori system was a slow method. In their view, they could not implement the Montessori method using all the materials because they had to prepare children for non-Montessori primary schools. Stella’s view summarizes the pressure felt:

[ST: ‘because with Montessori, if we say now we are going to do the real Montessori, maybe all the time will be consumed by, these materials because they are so many. You will not have time to teach this child to know numbers 1-20, how to calculate mathematics, how to read...][ST01:201]

[LE: Yah so the teachers we yaani (that is) we take it more seriously in senior class, Yah we do not give them to play a lot][LE01B:216; 218]

Consequently, Stella suggested that including afternoon sessions would give them time to engage children with Montessori materials. Moreover, Lenora thought the children could have passed the stage of play. She emphasized that at the level of a five-year-old “we are very serious” and that “we don’t allow them to play too much”. She quoted one of the ‘serious’ children in her class who tells the others “we come to school to learn”. This illustrates the disconnection between play and learning, as observed by Howard, Jenvey and Hill (2006) in their study of children who associated teacher absence with

play. This also reflects on how early educators use play in the early learning classrooms, as a structured process, rather than blending it with academic skills opportunities.

7.2.11 PRINCIPLE 11: NEED FOR CHALLENGING EXPERIENCES

The eleventh principle States: “*development and learning advance when children are challenged to achieve at a level just beyond their current mastery, and also when they have many opportunities to practice newly acquired skills*” (NAEYC, 2009:15).

Stella talked about providing the children with challenging experiences that not only call for use of the immediate children’s visible experiences, but also those that are of an abstract kind. The other teachers did not articulate this principle because it did not reflect in their practices. Stella illustrates an example that challenges her sentiments:

[ST: ‘because with Montessori, if we say now we are going to do the real Montessori, maybe all the time will be consumed by, these materials because they are so many. You will not have time to teach this child to know numbers 1-20, how to calculate mathematics, how to read...’][ST01:201]

[LE: Yah so the teachers we yaani (that is) we take it more seriously in senior class, Yah we do not give them to play a lot][LE01B:216; 218]

7.2.12 PRINCIPLE 12: CHILDREN’S EXPERIENCES SHAPE THEIR FUTURE LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT

The twelfth principle states: “*children’s experiences shape their motivation and approaches to learning, such as persistence, initiative, and flexibility; in turn these dispositions and behaviours affect their learning and development*” (NAEYC, 2009:15).

This last principle did not feature in the study, except when the teachers referred to the cumulative effects that lack of adequate preparation for the interview and transition academic requirements could have on the children’s future learning. For a detailed discussion of this theme, refer to the discussion on principle two and five.

7.2.13 A CONCLUSION ON THE LINK BETWEEN THE TEACHERS’ BELIEFS AND DAP

In the discussion that juxtaposes the teacher’s beliefs within the DAP 12 principles framework, it is clear that most of these principles exist within the *repertoire* of teachers’

experiences and beliefs, although they did not implement all the principles. This study found that teachers' beliefs and children's educational experience do not correspond in *practice* to a DAP framework, due to perceived pressure for task-based assessments. In three classes out of the four, the teachers used direct, rather than child-centred approaches to learning. This negates the principles of DAP which advocate a child-centred approach to learning at the ECD.

However, in line with the current DAP recommendations, for a context-specific cultural considerations, the DAP principles need to be applied selectively. Moreover, this selectiveness introduces relativity to context-specific considerations for DAP. As observed in this study, teachers' beliefs link to their perceptions of various dynamics in their context, including the perceived role of the preschool, their job retention, parents' expectations and the perceived competitive environment in which they practice. These dynamics are linked to the economic model of education, which might express the value attached to education in this context. Although I note the possible link between preschool provision in Kenya to the economic model, it is beyond the scope of this thesis to discuss it in detail.

Prochner *et al.* (2008:198), while limiting their discussion to the use of materials, introduce the concept of deep versus surface culture when interpreting what is appropriate in a context. Therefore, they conclude from their study that cultural expectations explain the differences observed among children attending preschools in Canada, India and South Africa, and that political, historical and social dynamics are likely to influence preschool practices.

In conclusion, the teachers' beliefs about developmentally appropriate educational practices exist within the spectrum of the twelve principles. While some of these principles featured in the children's educational experiences that became the basis of the elicited interviews, therefore more prominent, others did not feature in the discussion at all, because they were missing in both children's educational experiences and even teachers' conceptual sentiments. In the following section, I explore how the bioecological theory might provide the framework to interpret the findings of this study.

7.3 GOING DEDUCTIVE –THEMES INSIDE THE BIOECOLOGICAL THEORY

...from an ecological viewpoint, I suggest that the impact of daycare and the preschool in the nations families and society at large may have profound consequences than any direct effects for the development of human beings in modern industrialized societies (Bronfenbrenner, 1979:165).

7.3.1 INTRODUCTION

Theory in qualitative research is fundamental to framing, understanding and interpreting the research data, “whether consciously recognized or even identified” (Mertz & Anfara, 2006:189) and that:

Theory situates qualitative research clearly within the scholarly conversation, adds subtlety and complexity to what appear at first glance to be simple and allows a repertoire of understanding diverse perspectives of the same phenomena.

I concur with Mertz and Anfara (2006:192-93), that theory provides a lens through which to read research questions and to interpret and discuss results. In the following section, I present an analysis of the findings within the bioecological systems theory. Bronfenbrenner (2005; 1979) and Bronfenbrenner and Evans (2000) discuss five levels of the bioecological systems theory, namely: the microsystem, the mesosystem, the exosystem, the macrosystem and the chronosystem. Each of these levels will be defined as it is discussed. I choose the bioecological theory because of its ecological relevance of the dynamics of preschool beliefs and practices. Marshall (2004) notes that the current trend in early childhood research is to map children’s early educational experiences to their ecological settings in which they grow and develop. A social and cultural interpretation of early childhood practice provides situated, context-specific conclusions. Edwards (cited in Kilderry *et al.*, 2004:26) reinforces the need for practices to be understood within context, and “for research to be able to illuminate and clarify practices, it needs to be able to accommodate the complexities of practice in its contexts”.

In this discussion, I link teachers’ beliefs and children’s educational experiences to the different levels within the bioecological systems theory. Depending on the epicentre of discussion, there can be several ecological systems, even within one system. The

discussion will draw from the observed practices and the emerging belief themes as presented in chapter five and six.

In voyage five, the themes discussed were task-based and copying (teaching strategy), silence of materials (use of materials), content/task-based plans (scheduling), task-based and choral reading (assessment), and finally, group approaches, with limited differentiated copying tasks, to children's educational experiences (consideration of individual differences). In voyage six, I noted that teachers experienced various sources of pressure, namely: the interview, parents who demand written work, a different transition curriculum and/or requirements, colleague influence, and a response to a competitive school environment. In the discussion, I will subsume the themes into the different levels of the bioecological systems theory.

It is difficult to isolate the themes and fix them into singular levels of the bioecological systems, for example, copying and task completion which might originate from the microsystem, could also fit within the exosystem, if a teacher 'borrows' methods and content from another school. This might be through 'own collection' or if a teacher imports methods to introduce to other teachers. However, to provide a systematic approach to the discussion, I sort these themes into the various systems: the microsystem, the mesosystem, the exosystem and the macrosystem. However, this does not imply that once a theme is located with a particular level within the bioecological system theory, it cannot apply at another level. This is because the effects and interactional relationships are non-linear, active and multilevel over time and the effect of proximal processes. Bronfenbrenner and Morris (in Bronfenbrenner & Evans, 2000:118) define proximal processes to "involve a transfer of energy between the developing human being and the persons, objects, and symbols in the immediate environment". Therefore, it is possible for a theme to exist across ecological domains, depending on the impact it has on the 'system components' at the level under discussion. For example, the theme on the *interviews* that influenced all the constructs of the study is located at all levels of the bioecological systems theory, because of the synergistic effects it had on the teachers' beliefs and children's experiences at all levels.

While the teachers mentioned some of the factors shown in figure 45 during the interview, I inferred some of them from the discussions, general literature review on preschool education in Kenya, as well as my own observations based on experience and

more generally. I theorize to provide an holistic picture. It is important to note that while the diagram illustrates a general overview of some of the factors discussed, the specific themes and how each of them fits within a certain level of the bioecological systems theory proceeds in the discussion under each of the levels identified; microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem and macrosystem levels.

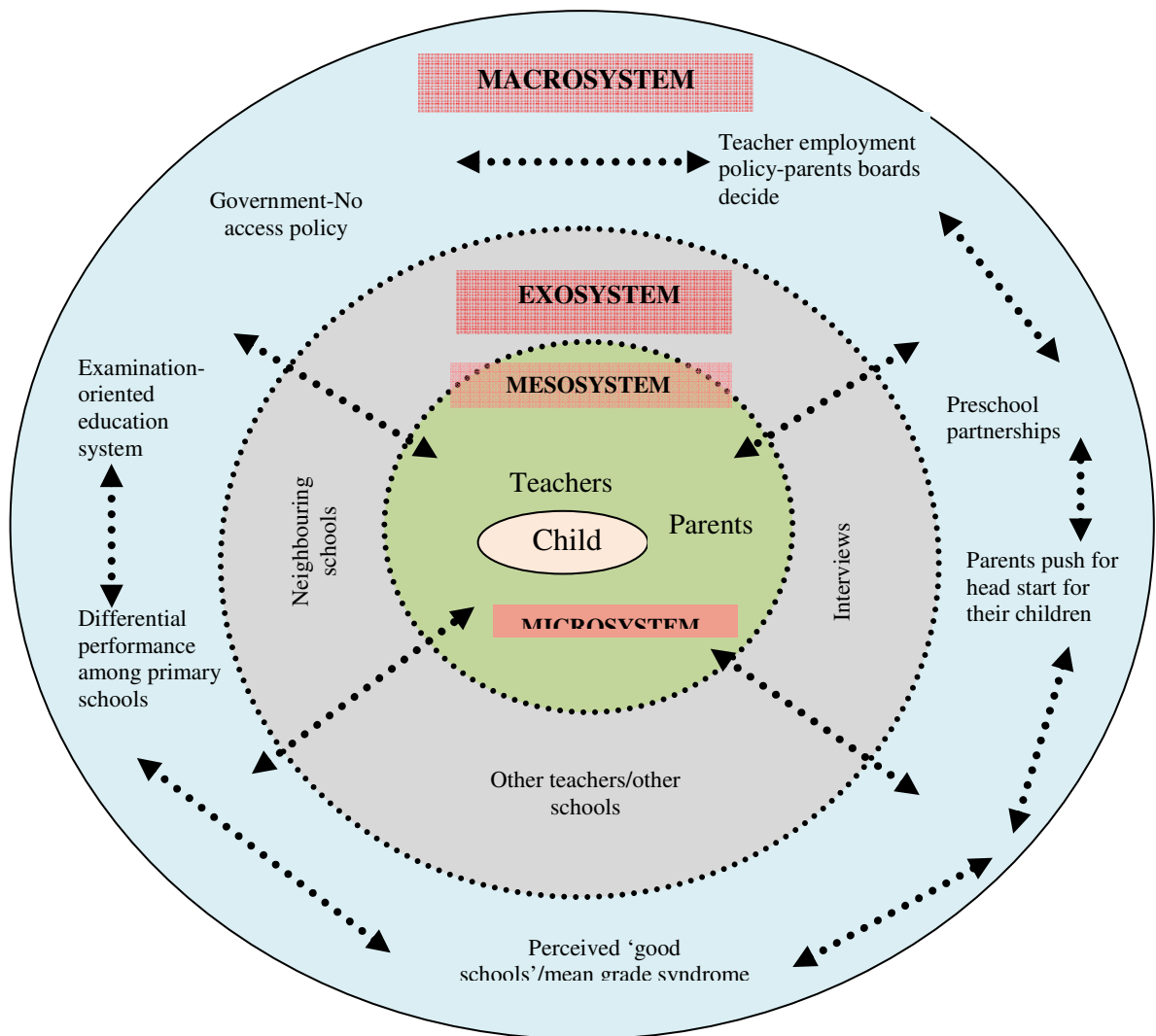


FIGURE 45: Factors in the bioecological systems that affect preschool teachers’ experiences (Adapted from Bronfenbrenner, 1979; 2005)

In figure 45 (above), I provide a general preview of some of the factors that I extrapolate from the study findings, to provide a more generalised view of how some of the beliefs interrelate with each other in the bioecological systems framework in the Kenyan early childhood context.

7.3.2 CONNECTING THEMES TO THE MICROSYSTEM EXPERIENCE

Bronfenbrenner defines the microsystem as “the structures and processes taking place in an immediate setting containing the developing person (e.g., the school, classroom, playground” (Bronfenbrenner, 2005:80). The themes emerging from the study that fit within the microsystem include task-based copying and choral reading, while the teacher belief factors that fit within the microsystem include pressure from parents for skills-based teaching and colleague influence to use divergent approaches. In this study, I assume that the microsystem under focus is the school, with multi-layered subsystems that include teachers in the same school, children and parents, with each of the complex components affecting each other (Bronfenbrenner, 1979:3). According to the ecological systems theory, components of the microsystem do not exist independently of each other, but rather affect each other as they interact face-to-face. As Bronfenbrenner noted (2005:6):

Over the life course, human development takes place through processes of progressive more complex reciprocal interaction between an active, evolving biopsychological human organism and the persons, objects, and symbols in its external environment.

From this statement, I make three assumptions to guide the discussion: that the person interaction has *many* potential levels, with both *people* and *objects*. Secondly, the interacting organism is a ‘*psychological*’ system with physical needs, motives, and behavioural dispositions, guided by ‘*thoughts*’ or the psyche. Thirdly, the interacting person has *expectations* for an outcome, arising from the interactive process (Bronfenbrenner 1979:3-4). Therefore, as we discuss the microsystem components that I identify as children, parents and teachers, we appreciate the intricate, non-linear process through which each affects the other in their course of development (Bronfenbrenner, 1972; 1979; 2000; 2005). Figure 46 (below) is an illustration of how the subsystem components interact.

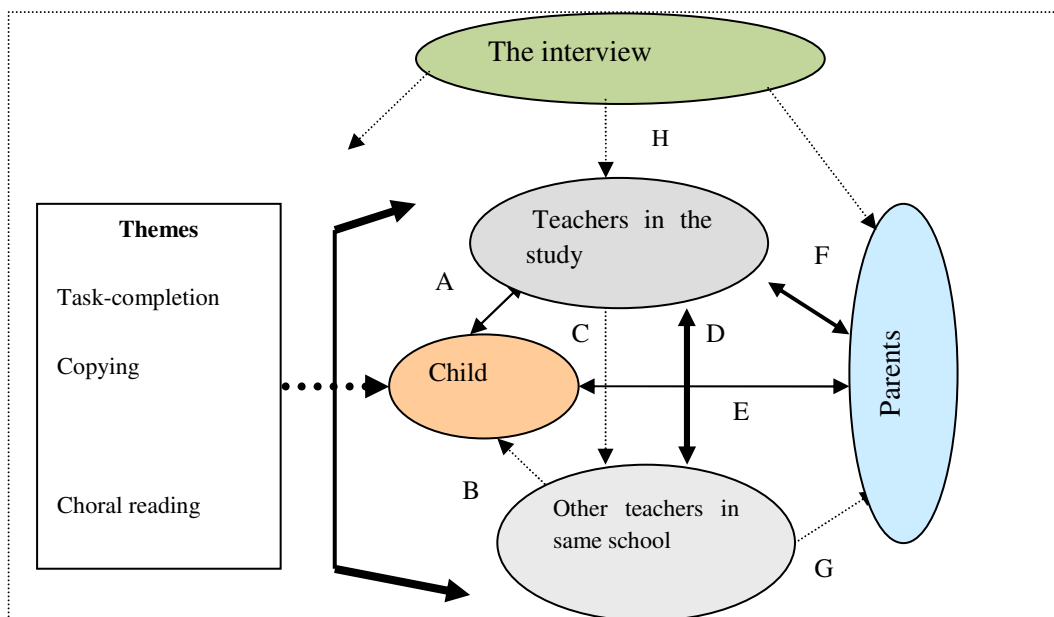


FIGURE 46: The direction of interaction by the microsystem components within a mesosystem level

At the microsystem, direct interactions proceed between the teacher and the child [A], as well as between the child and their parents [E], and the teacher and the parent [F]. The interaction between the teachers and fellow teachers within the same school is both bidirectional and indirect. Whereas teachers *explicitly share* teaching approaches, as illustrated by arrow D, at other times, methods might be *perceived* as illustrated by arrow C, thus providing indirect pressure to the ‘perceiving’ teacher (concerned teacher) to adopt them. Although children might not have a direct interaction with those teachers not teaching them (see B), they ‘experience’ the trickle effects from the interactions that their teachers have with their colleagues (see D). It is worth noting that these *interact at the mesosystem*, which does not consist of any tangible component, but rather how those interacting perceive and interpret their life events.

Neither do parents have a direct link with the ‘other teacher’ (see G), (not teaching their child), but their expectations benchmarked on comparison with other teachers in the same school influence how the teacher interacts with their child in the learning process. Therefore, at the microsystem level, other teachers within the same school, as well as parents with children in the school, or even in other schools, affect how teachers plan for children’s educational experiences. At the microsystem level, the overarching concern about the interview is not direct (see H), but has a psychological effect on the teachers’

beliefs and children's educational experiences. The direct sources of pressure at this level are the parents. All teachers noted that they were concerned to give parents feedback on their children's performance [EN01:332-336; ST02:226-230; BE01:212; 214; LE0A1:108-118-02]. To add, Belinda observed that parents use other schools to gauge the quality of the school their child is attending. Specifically, she noted that parents compare different schools in their syllabus coverage, children's learning activities, and the overall performance of children in academic skills [BE:204-220; LE01B:320-334].

To illustrate further on the various levels of interactions among people and objects in the microsystem and their potential effects on behaviour, the teachers suggested that their colleagues had influenced the way they taught. Stella talked about using a mathematical approach introduced by one of the teachers in her school [ST03-444-01; 454-01; ST03-526-538-01]. Enid *perceived* pressure to use a divergent non-Montessori approach used by other teachers, such as the 'writing over' method which is faster than the sensorial approach to teaching letters [Ref EN04:26], illustrating a perceived, rather than implicitly shared method. Belinda, who is originally trained as a Montessori teacher but now teaching in a DICECE school, observed that she had changed to teach language through picture words, rather than using the letter sound system in which she trained as a Montessori teacher (Ref BE:536-544). Lenora articulated how teachers had responded by including 'teachers' *own collection*' to prepare for the expected interviews [LE01A:670; 672; 673; 674; LE01B:268-270]. Although teachers' own collection also fits at the exosystem level (because of the interview and comparison with other schools), it is applied at the microsystem level because this is the level at which the teachers apply 'their own collection'. Researchers note that a range of experiences is likely to influence teachers' beliefs (Schoonmaker & Ryan, in Cassidy & Lawrence, 2000:193-4; Lightfoot & Valsiner, in Cuskelly & Detering, 2003:45).

To summarise the preceding discussion, we note some factors located at the microsystem that operate at the mesosystem level that might explain the themes of the study. These include pressure from fellow colleagues to diversify the teaching approach, and to introduce non-preschool curriculum content through 'own collection', as well as pressure from parents to teach academic content and to measure up to other schools that perform well. All these factors interplay at the mesosystem, which is the 'psychological level' of interaction to affect the children's educational experiences and teachers' beliefs. In the

following section, I connect the research themes to the exosystem level, the level after the microsystem and the mesosystem.

7.3.3 CONNECTING THEMES TO THE EXOSYSTEM LEVEL

7.3.3.1 Introduction

Bronfenbrenner defines the exosystem to

...encompass the linkages and processes taking place between two or more settings, at least one of which does not ordinarily contain the developing person, but in which events occur that influence processes within the immediate setting that contain that person... (Bronfenbrenner, 2005:80).

Three issues located at the exosystem that explain the observed children's educational experiences and emerging teachers' beliefs are: a competitive school environment; the interview that arises from competition for limited vacancies in standard one; and teachers' responses to the prevailing competition. In figure 47 (below), the interview is at the core of the observed practices, but also the teachers' *job security* and parents' concern to *access* limited good public resources. These have a peripheral influence on the interactions at the exosystem level, hence the directional arrows that do not link to any particular component. I discuss in the subsequent sections how the core components interrelate to influence children's educational experiences.

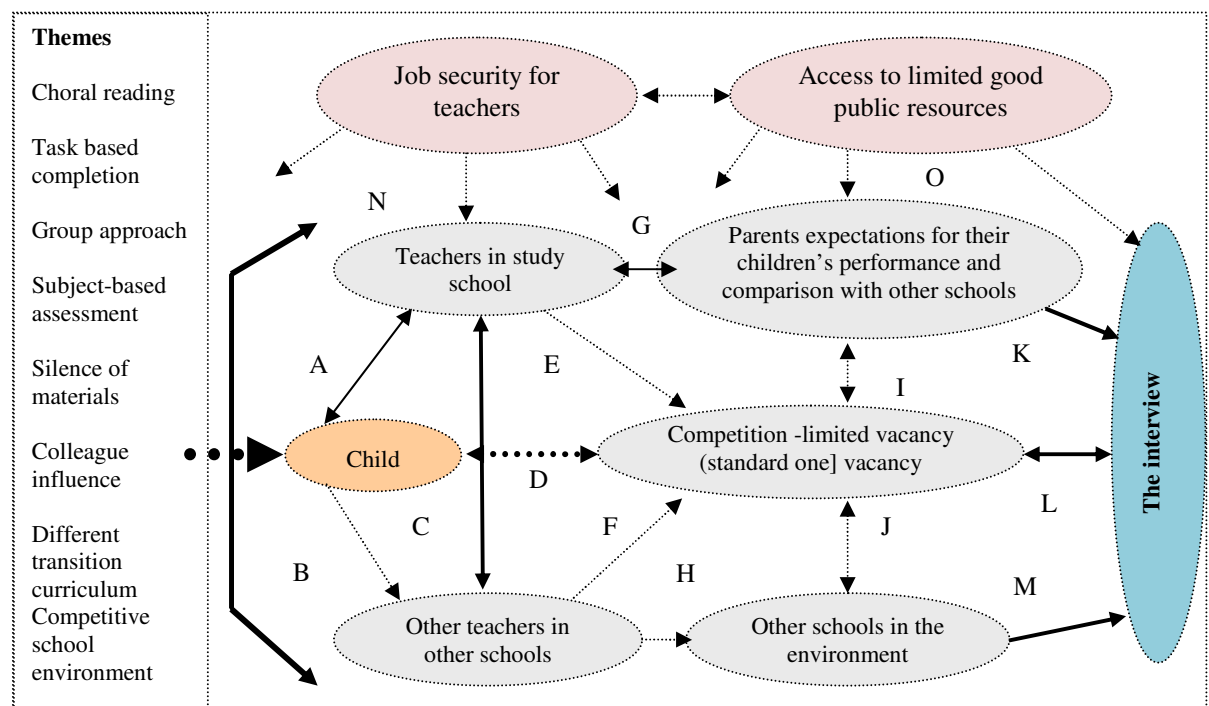


FIGURE 47: The direction of interaction by the exosystem components

Figure 47 (above) illustrates the various exosystem interactive components, with direct (actual interaction), and indirect (psychological level) effects on each other. At this level, the interacting components are the teachers in the study school, other teachers in other schools, schools within the environment of the study that compete for the limited vacancies in the ‘good public’ schools, and parents’ expectations for their children’s success at the interview, all interacting to produce the observed practices and teachers’ beliefs. At this level, the *interview* concerns are at the *core* of beliefs and children’s educational experiences. However, beyond the obvious interview are two issues that might originate from the macrosystem: the *teachers’ job security* and the *parents’ concern* to enrol their children in ‘good public’ schools that charge lower fees and whose learners are likely to perform well in the national examination. Lenora and Stella were concerned about the consequences of their employment if children failed in the entry interview. This concern appears to be related to teachers’ policy on employment. As it is, the Kenyan government has no policy on teachers’ employment (Biersteker *et al.*, 2008:233-4) as will be discussed under the macrosystem level.

7.3.3.2 Responding to a competitive environment

All teachers anchored their arguments on the fact that schools compete among each other to produce the best results and so retain or increase enrolment. Lenora and Belinda, who were the DICECE teachers, were under pressure to compete with the private schools, as part of increasing the enrolment of their school seemed. The Montessori preschool is classified as a private school in this setting. Besides scheming to their own collection, all the teachers were concerned that parents would want to compare their performance to that of other schools, where some of their children were attending. Parents’ demand to compare performance between schools, perhaps after seeing another school perform better [Refs ST02:226-230; EN04:303-311; BE01:212-214; LE01A:696-709]. This motivated these teachers to focus on skills-based learning, as indicated by Lenora’s comments that they teach the curriculum that is not even done by children in the lower primary school [LE: *‘like provinces and all those that do not even come in lower classes’*] [LE01A: 686- 690].

Enid highlighted what she observed as peculiar characteristics of the particular setting (my study setting). In her view their focus was more on academics than the handwriting of the child, in contrast to a school in town, as she observed “*because they know that*

may be if it is a Montessori school, they know they will do well, that is what they believe [EN05:303]. Enid's and Stella's observation that this is a *unique environment*, confirm my earlier assumption that the relatively few *sought-after* school put pressure on the teachers and the children to perform to the test. Enid said '*whatever they do there, it is tough, they do not bring things like one plus one or two plus two...because of that, we are a bit ahead...most of the things we do is to run, we are trying to chase the...what can I say, time or what?*' [EN01:332-336].

Enid attributed this focus to the demands for academic skills necessary for school admission that she implied had become more stringent with time. Stella corroborated the observation that the academic requirements in the Montessori preschool were more and higher than was her experience in other schools that she had taught in before. She expressed her apprehension "*maybe if somebody brings a child to baby class after a week or at the end of the day he wants to see that, that the child already has written something, something on a book*" [ST02:226-230].

7.3.3.3 Interviewing for admission

Resulting from a competitive school environment, some schools use interviews to select and eliminate low-performing children. Interviewing children for admission is a unique phenomenon defining some preschools in Kenya, particularly those observed. In any case, Mwaura *et al.* (2008:238) and Biersteker *et al.* (2008:2280) observe that preschool in Kenya, although not mandatory, is part of school transition. Unlike some settings that freely admit children to standard one, others such as the ones in this study site and other urban settings, require them to qualify through an entry interview. Therefore, since the interview is not a national requirement, it is a creation of some schools because it is not a government policy for admission to standard one. Although the interview serves to hold teachers accountable to the parents and other stakeholders, it also puts pressure on them to teach to the test. Consequently, preschool teachers face pressure or even feel threatened by the interview. The participating teachers were categorical that their educational practices was partly to prepare children to pass the interview and to transition successfully and to fit with the curriculum demands of the primary school [e.g. Ref ST01:201; EN04:167-01; BE01:204-220; LE01:630-634].

Competition to enrol children in the neighbouring primary school put pressure on Enid and Lenora to focus on academic skills. In their experience they request to see the standard one interview examination papers after the interview to help them prepare the children to perform better in future (Ref: LE02:96-114; EN01:348-352). Enid was emphatic that parents chose Tumaini Montessori School because they thought it performed well in the interview [Ref EN04:303; 305]. Although Enid and Lenora focused to prepare children for the interview, Enid was empathetic about the demands for academic skills, beyond the preschool. Therefore, in her view, it was helpful to prepare children for the rigour of the primary school curriculum demands.

Closely linked to the competitive environment and the interview requirements is a concern by the teachers to teach beyond the preschool curriculum. Lenora referred to scheming to their own collection [LE01A: 670- 674], that they acquired through colleagues within the same school and from other schools, especially those teaching in the urban centres. Teachers ‘scheming to their own collection’ confirm the influence of the interaction of some of the exosystem component beyond the immediate environment of the child and the teachers.

From a personal observation of the dynamics of education provision in Kenya at all levels of education, parents compare the performances of schools within a setting. In this setting, the list of the children’s performance in the interview, including the details of their previous preschools, is usually displayed in a public places. This has implications for both the image of the school and for the teachers presenting the children for the interview. The teachers in this setting were concerned about the public perception of their performance, besides negative reactions from parents if their children did not perform well in their examinations. Enid succinctly summarized her perception of what was required of the preschool child: “*good handwriting, do math, English, neat clear!*”

That the setting was a University also influenced many values related to childcare. It is possible that teachers also expect good performance from their school that is located at a University setting. High expectations for performance might predispose teachers to ‘self-imposed’ pressure to meet such expectations. Alternatively, parents might reinforce high expectations because their children attend a school in the University. Parker and Neuharth-Pritchett (2006) observe that teachers experience self-imposed pressure, especially if their expectations for children’s performance in skills originate from

teachers themselves. Conversely, what is evident in the current study is the push to admit children on the ‘sought after-schools’ basis (Mwaura *et al.*, 2008:238), one of which is located in the current study location. This has continued to put pressure on the teachers to prepare the children to pass the entry interview.

Overall, the two factors interrelated that influence teachers beliefs and their practices at the exosystem are practices that respond to a competitive environment, and those that equip children to perform well in the transition interview. These practices include focusing on academic skills and teachers including their own collection in the preschool curriculum. Although all these dynamics could subtly explain the observed children’s educational experiences, the picture is not complete without considering factors whose genesis is in the macrosystem level. I discuss the dynamics of education provision with a focus on preschool provision in the next section that considers the macrosystem components.

7.3.4 CONNECTING THEMES TO THE MACROSYSTEM LEVEL

7.3.4.1 Introduction

In the following discussion, I focus on policies that directly relate to early childhood provision, teacher employment, the role of partnerships, and the absence of direct government funding. Further, I discuss how an examination oriented system, the role of the media, and preschools that are separate from the primary school influence teachers’ beliefs and children’s educational experiences. The issues discussed at this level are social, cultural, economic and political dynamics of early childhood provision in Kenya. All these factors operate at the Kenya government and society levels, which are at the macrosystem level (figure 48, below).

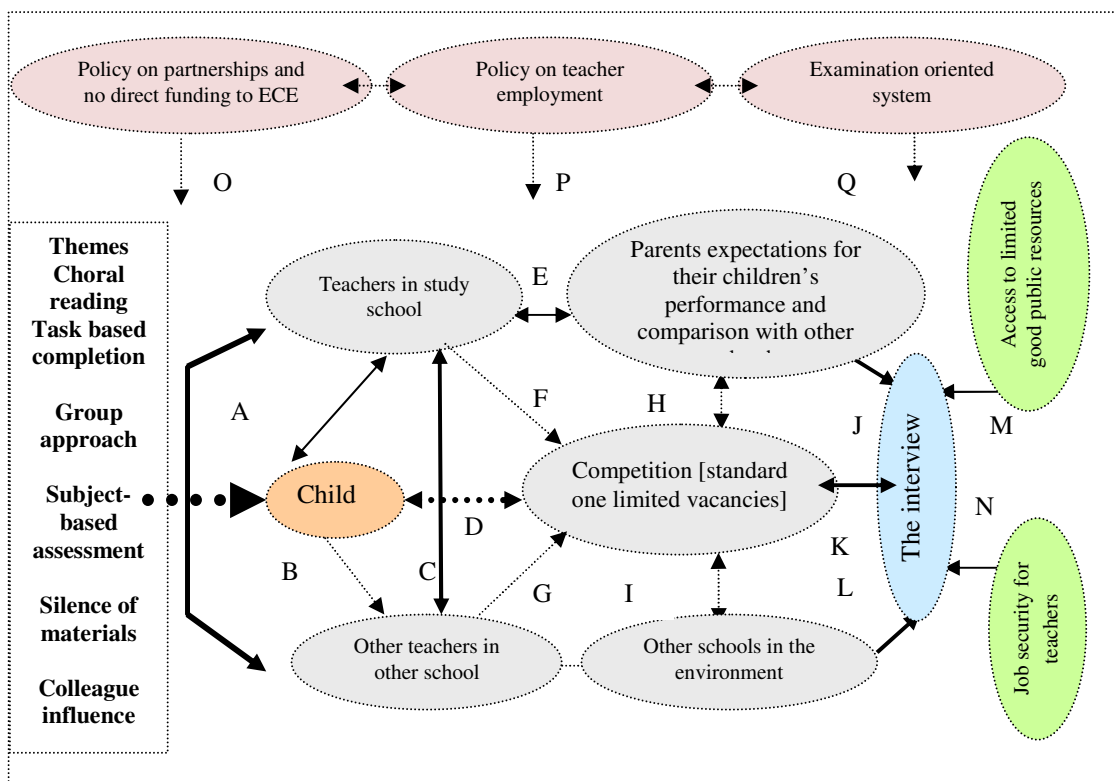


FIGURE 48: The direction of interaction by the macrosystem components
Bronfenbrenner identifies a macrosystem as:

[An]...overarching pattern of ideology and organisation of the social institutions common to a particular culture or subculture..., [It] comprises of the patterns of the micro-, meso-, and exosystems characteristic of a given society or segment thereof. It may be thought of as a societal blueprint for a particular culture or subculture (Bronfenbrenner, 2005:81)

Kilderry *et al.* (2004:27) observe that “teaching and working with young children is political, and decisions about young children’s welfare and education are being made all the time”. Such decisions include government policies that relate to maternal employment and provision of early childhood services, that are likely have an indirect influence on the teachers’ beliefs and practices. Bronfenbrenner stresses the overarching effect that policies can have on everyday events that result in human development:

Public policy is a part of the macrosystem determining the specific properties of the exo-, meso- and microsystem that occur at the level of everyday life and steer the course of behaviour and development (1979:9).

By providing a synthesis of how some of the policies, such as NCLB in the USA, are intricately linked to the DAP, Goldstein (2008:254) demonstrates how culturally, economically, and politically driven policies affect early childhood provision. In Kenya too, some education policies provide insight into early childhood provision. For example, the government does not employ preschool teachers, nor are they part of the Teachers' Service Commission (TSC), the government body that employs teachers for the primary and secondary levels of education (Republic of Kenya & UNESCO, 2005; Adams & Swadener, 2000).

7.3.4.2 Partnerships in preschool provision

The Kenya government has enjoined partners to provide early child education services. Consequently, different stakeholders and partners manage and finance most preschools. These include municipalities, parents and private sector who manage most preschools, with no direct government financial support (Adams & Swadener, 2000; Biersteker *et al.*, 2008; Mwaura *et al.*, 2008:238; Republic of Kenya & UNESCO, 2005; Republic of Kenya, 2005; 2006b; 2007; Swadener *et al.*, 2008:413). Resulting from these partnerships are three issues that might influence preschool educational practices. These are; funding and related rationale for preschool provision, teacher-employment and job retention and divergent stakeholder priorities. Teachers too are partners in the provision of early childhood services, although this might not always be apparent. Regardless of the early childhood curriculum guidelines provided by the government to guide ECE practices, a divergent stakeholder involvement and their subsequent interests in preschool derails the full implementation of such a curriculum.

To cite an example, accountability to parents and school management, for the sake of employment retention, compel the teachers to focus on preparing children to pass the interview. Consequently, although the ECE guidelines are specific about the need for teachers to use DAP, teachers are compelled to use teacher-directed approaches that ensure a successful preparation for school transition. Evidently, stakeholder values and priorities in this instance vary as Katz, (1995:130) postulates.

Some of the teachers expressed concern with their employment. In Kenya, there is no government policy framework for the employment of preschool teachers, but rather parents and other stakeholders employ teachers and manage preschools (Mwaura *et al.*,

2008: 238; Biersteker *et al.*, 2008:233). This put pressure on teachers to teach academic subjects. Stella observed that if the children failed to perform in the interview, she would lose her job [ST03:334; 338-02; 356; 358-02]. Lenora had the same opinion [LE02:677-679]. As observed in this study, focus on academic skills reflects on the conclusion by Tierney (in Robinson & Diaz, 2006:51), that teachers are now “managers who provide children with strategies to pass tests”.

Teachers focused on teaching skills to reflect parents’ concerns, as Enid’s comments illustrate:

[EN: Mmh, you know the only thing they are always worried about is for their child to go may be primary school, a good primary school][EN04:303; 307; EN04:311]

This is a problematic stakeholder prioritization on what areas of child development to focus. On the wider level, Robinson and Diaz (2006:51) link the need for testing and standardization to the competitive global market, which puts pressure on teachers *to teach to the test*, as different stakeholders hold them accountable if the children fail. Teachers’ focus to prepare children to pass examinations so that they can retain their employment reflects the economic model of education. Currently, society has increasingly perceived children, not for their sentimental value, but their economic value (Robinson & Diaz, 2006:51). This has a direct link with teacher employment.

Lenora’s comments illustrate the economic model aimed at increasing school enrolment to be able to retain their employment: “[LE: *If the children do not make to standard one, we shall lose children...parents see the school, that does well...takes more children to standard one...*] [(Ref. LE01A:696; 698; 705; 707; 709; LE01B:320-334)]

7.3.4.3 Examination oriented system and the media

The observations made in the children’s educational experiences and the emerging teachers beliefs directly relate to the dynamics of education in Kenya and particularly preschool education, where parents seek to enrol their children in ‘sought-after’ schools (Mwaura *et al.*, 2008:237). The existence of private schools that do well in national examinations, a competitively selective process of education, which favours those who pass examinations, and a highly examination-oriented system of education (Prochner &

Kabiru, 2008:126), partly explain the observed practices and beliefs. There is a perception among the stake-holders that some schools, at all levels, are better than others, hence a survival need by some schools to maintain the status-quo, while others strive for excellence, or to catch up. The Kenyan media and society has sometimes referred to this trend as the “*Mean-grade syndrome*”. Mostly, the Kenyan system of education is highly examination-oriented, with selection to high school and university made solely through examinations administered at the end of each school cycle. It therefore looks like the teachers realize the demands of the primary curriculum and use it as a basis for teaching.

The Kenyan media have also played a role in accentuating the performance debate. Until recently, the Kenya National Examinations Council (KNEC) used to rank schools according to their performance. However, with the Kenya Certificate of Secondary Examination (KCSE) results released in February 2009, the focus on ranking shifted from the school to the candidate⁵¹. Although this still maintains a level of pressure to excel among candidates, it lessens pressure on competition among schools. Apart from the interview as a source of pressure on some preschools, the implication for ranking and publication is an indirect link with early childhood education, where primary schools might still want to admit only the best preschool children to their schools.

Generally, the examination-oriented system has created a competitive psyche in the social system, which places emphasis on “*in what position were you?*” or “*what was your mean score?*” in the Kenya school system. Enid suggested that parents assess and enrol their children into primary schools that perform well in KCPE [EN04:303; 307; EN04:311]. Lenora perceived that private schools have scaled up the curriculum, thus intensifying the academic excellence requirements in the competitive environment [LE01A:646-658].

7.3.4.4 Separate preschools from primary schools

Most preschools are separate from the primary schools. Maybe if the preschools had primary schools linked to them, the teachers would not be overly concerned about their children failing to gain admission. This has implications for access, admission and

⁵¹ The K.N.E.C now ranks the top 100 candidates from each province, and the national media houses reproduce these lists in their dailies, the day after the results are released.

continuity. Biersteker and colleagues (2008:233) conclude that there is disjuncture between preschool and primary school in Kenya, since preschool and primary school training exist in isolation. Teachers were concerned that the admission interview excluded their children from the primary school. Lenora said she reserved no effort in ensuring that her children pass the interview [LE02:671-675]. In addition, she felt that the primary school admission should not engage children in interviews, rather, preschool teachers should be empowered to recommend children for primary admission [LE02:691; 693]. Stella perceived pressure to prepare children to transition from Montessori curriculum to the mainstream curriculum [ST01:201].

Although a primary school attached to the preschool might not be a panacea for the felt pressure to teach academic subjects, it would lessen the pressure for both parents and teachers to seek admission for standard one. However, as mentioned, the social and economic dynamics in education provision in Kenya, which is not limited to preschool, but also to all levels of education, mean that schools that perform better in national examinations are generally more valued than the lesser performers. Therefore, even if a preschool attached to the primary school lessens pressure for access, this does not eliminate the quest for ‘better schools’, because parents still wish to admit their children in ‘sought after’ schools. Worse still, UNESCO (in Biersteker *et al.*, 2008:241) warns that there might be a focus on academic skills at the expense of the whole child, if the preschool is within a primary school. This raises a conceptual issue to beware, even if a preschool co-exist with a primary school.

7.3.5 A CONCLUSION: DYNAMICS OF THE BIOECOLOGICAL SYSTEMS OF PRESCHOOL PROVISION

From the discussion on the bioecological systems theory, I observe that there are various components both in person (teachers, parents and children), and objects (materials), which also include interviews that combine to provide insight about the various observations made in the study. At the microsystem level, I observe that although teachers and parents interact, the teachers’ perception of the interview and concerns from parents for school transition provide additional explanation for the dynamics of school transition. These four components; parents, children, colleagues in the same school and the perceptions about the interview, interact in a mesosystem paradigm to produce the observed practices. At the exosystem level, pressure from parents takes a peripheral

effect, while the direct effect of the interview creates a competitive school environment and teachers' strategies for coping, with the competition taking centre stage. At the macrosystem level, the impact of the policies, such as enjoining partners in preschool provision; absence of employment policy for early childhood teachers; absence of government funding; and an examination oriented education system, impacts directly or indirectly on early childhood education. Therefore, taken singly or together these factors explain the teachers' beliefs and children's educational practices within a DAP framework. As discussed, what contrasts with the recommendations of DAP is actually appropriate if all the factors discussed within the bioecological systems are taken into consideration. In order to embrace cultural multiplicity and variable expectations of the preschool, I seek to advance a *seesaw* model to help understand and modify the DAP framework to suit contextual realities.

7.4 ADVANCING A SEESAW MODEL OF DAEP

7.4.1 A GENERAL INTRODUCTION

In the following section, I integrate empirical and theoretical literature to advance a seesaw model as an alternative to interpret and to understand DAP in cultural contexts that varies in their focus of children's educational priorities. The discussion of the seesaw model is juxtaposed with the DAP framework as advanced in the early childhood literature, while the use of the term developmentally appropriate educational practices (DAEP) in this section is the new framework advanced in this section to emphasize the *educational* component in the DAP framework. The discussion is divided into three parts: first, the DAP framework is restated to provide a platform to discuss in the second part, the various points of equilibrium postulated for the seesaw model. The third part of the discussion relates the different points of equilibrium to early childhood literature on teachers' beliefs about developmentally appropriate practices. In the section following, I provide an overview of the seesaw model.

7.4.2 AN OVERVIEW OF THE COMPONENTS OF A MORE INTEGRATED DAEP MODEL

From the findings of the current research about children's educational experiences and the factors that are likely to impact teachers' beliefs about DAEP, and the literature in DAP in general, I integrate four implicit and explicit components in the learning context

to present a comprehensive framework. Such a framework facilitates a balance between emphasis on academic skills and the holistic approach to child development. In this developmentally appropriate educational framework, I link four intersecting components that ought to form a DAEP framework. These are: *-children’s developmental needs, teacher decisions* (as agents of themselves and of the schools they serve); *schools’ objectives* (as agents of themselves, of parents that they serve, and as custodians to implement education policies), *social and political considerations* (the purpose for which preschool education is provided). I present these factors as circles whose meeting point should form the basis of a balanced DAEP framework. The components of DAEP intersect in teacher-directed/ initiated and child-centred/initiated processes that provide a balanced DAEP. Figure 49 (below) illustrates the components of the DAEP.

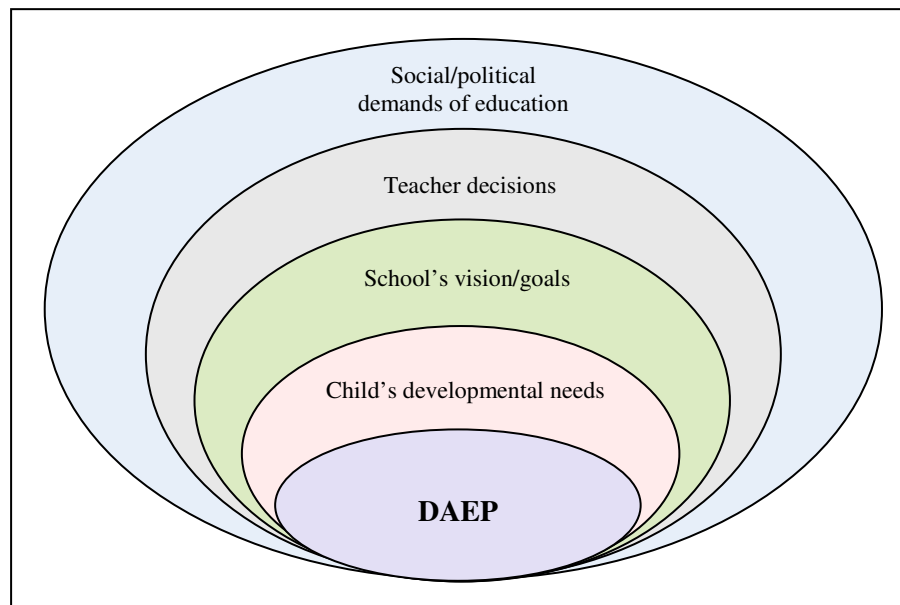


FIGURE 49: Components of a more integrated and balanced DAEP

From the theoretical and empirical perspective, there is a consensus that children’s holistic development ought to guide a DAP framework (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997; Charlesworth, Hart, Burts & DeWolf, 1993:12-3; Charlesworth, 1998; Ludlow & Berkeley; Jalongo *et al.*, 2004:144; Kostelnik *et al.*, 2004: 16-7; Philips, in Klein & Chen, 2001:31; NAEYC, 1997; 2009). Edwards (2005:38) argues that embracing the constructivist paradigm for early childhood education, as the DAP framework suggests, predisposes the child as “the lone scientist”, even if he or she is actively constructing knowledge. What is needed in a DAP framework are purposive activities, so that

teachers do not “leave children to their own devices”, even when teachers embrace play as a method of teaching (Stipek, 2007:742).

Conversely, within the current DAP framework, there is a lack of an explicit approach for teachers to include academic skills in children’s development, even though these are requisite to their later functioning at school. The result has been contentions, regarding the DAP framework and whether it is applicable to all contexts (Penn, 2008). Moreover, contentions also exist about how and whether early educators should provide children with academic skills (Stipek, 2007; NAEYC, 2009).

Therefore, I include the *educational* component in the current DAEP framework, whose exclusion has resulted in the problematic interpretation of how to include academic skills in child development. To include the education component would provide a basis for assessing DAP as a curriculum framework, rather than a general framework that addresses ‘appropriate practices’ for children. Grisham-Brown *et al.* (2005:21) further warn that the DAP framework alone does not meet the definitions of a curriculum framework, despite its significance in guiding interaction with children and developmentally appropriate skills. In their view, a curriculum framework consists of assessment of children’s developmental level; scope and sequence of the developmental areas; a framework to address children’s individual needs; the direction of interactions and daily activities; use of materials; the organisation and use of the learning environment; and procedures for monitoring children’s learning processes.

Although the DAP framework is a standardized document, Grisham-Brown *et al.* (2005:21) note that “standards are not standardized” but rather depend on the competencies required of children (Kurtenbach, in Grisham-Brown *et al.*, 2005:23). Such competencies vary from one context to another, depending on the social and cultural purposes which education serves, and the values and priorities of stakeholders, who include policy makers, educators and community members (Grisham-Brown *et al.*, 2005:23). Therefore, the content of DAP that should consist of a socially derived curriculum framework is equally important in this new DAEP.

The DAEP framework *assumes* dynamics that influence the way a teacher embraces DAP template. However, I argue for the centrality of *teachers’* presence in the new DAEP framework. Although they are not central in figure 46, their role in implementing

the DAP framework cannot be overstated. Smidt (2006:63) notes that in the early childhood curriculum, the *process* is as important as the *product* or the outcome.

In my view, the DAP framework only exists as a guide and only becomes a reality upon its implementation *by the teachers*, through a *process*, with its success or failure depending on *the teacher*. The question that arises therefore is, ought such a very important component in the success of DAEP be subsumed in the DAP framework?

Clearly, even such variable and often vague factors, such as parents' expectations, schools' visions, and teachers' employment policies that are not included in the framework, influence the implementation of DAEP. Therefore, I argue that the conditions for the successful implementation of DAP lie beyond the classroom interactive process, but most significantly, it might be that teachers have a more important role in the implementation of DAP than previously acknowledged, that is more than just serving a transmissive function.

According to Clark and Peterson (in Cassidy & Lawrence, 2000:184), teachers are "clinicians who diagnose learning problems", and seek solutions to them. Lee (2006:433) cautions that "a teacher is a professional ... who has more in common with physicians, lawyers and architects than with technicians who execute skilled performances according to prescriptions or algorithms defined by others" (Clark & Peterson, quoted by Lee, 2006:433). Lee (2006) is concerned that preschool teachers rarely find a way to express their disquiet.

I agree with the authors that teaching is not a scripted process, as implied by the DAP template. Therefore, the model that I advance, based on the current study, does not assume the teachers' presence in the DAP framework. Rather it explicitly includes the presence of teachers in the new framework for a more balanced DAEP. Since teachers' intentions, actions, voices and goodwill are the bases of a functional DAP (Lee, 2006:440). NAEYC (2009) acknowledges that 'the how' is not a new question in DAP, yet the key to the 'how' lies with the teachers (Katz, 1995:100). In the seesaw model, the teacher plays a valuable role in balancing between competing priorities. In the following section, I discuss the dynamics of the seesaw model.

7.4.3 THE SEESAW THEORY/MODEL

The seesaw theory has its origins in physics, the details of which are beyond the scope of this discussion. However, I import this theory for its benefits to inform the current dynamics of DAEP. My objective for advancing a seesaw model is to provide a label and a framework to refer to the different points of equilibrium of, and emphasis on, children's educational experiences of a DAEP seesaw. There are premises on which the seesaw model pivots:

1. That the teacher is the agent of implementing the socially derived educational content in a process deemed appropriate for child development.
2. That when teachers let children focus on child-centred activities (read content/concerns for child developmental needs) at the preschool, children might not be equipped with the academic skills necessary for their later functioning at school.
3. That teacher-directed activity (read socially/politically driven content/concerns) at the preschool equips children with social and emotional skills for later functioning in life's contexts.
4. That the emphasis that preschool child's educational experiences take depends on varying stakeholder perspectives and expectations for preschools.
5. That children's educational and developmental needs attain equilibrium (emphasis) when various stakeholder needs/ perspectives overlap with children's developmental needs in DAEP.
6. That there is a point of equilibrium (read emphasis) upon which a balance exists between children's developmental needs and their acquisition of academic skill.

Figure 50 (below) illustrates all the above assumptions in a summary of three varying levels of emphasis: child-centred activities, teacher-directed activities and a balance between child-centred and teacher-directed activities, which also balances the seesaw at the centre.

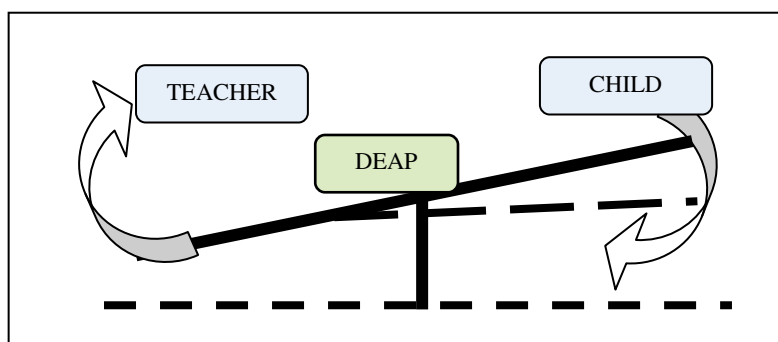


FIGURE 50: Teacher-centred and child-centred relations on a seesaw

The seesaw has two extreme points, at the right and left ends equidistant to each other, from the central point. The central part is the pivotal point on which the seesaw (children’s educational experiences) attains its perfect balance. Therefore, for it to balance, the weight (emphasis between academic skills and children’s holistic development through their preschool educational practices in our case) at each end needs to be of an equal significance. In the model, when emphasis tips towards either left or right, it leads to imbalance or a state of disequilibrium. Figure 51 (below) illustrates the different states of equilibrium for understanding preschool teacher’s beliefs of children’s developmentally appropriate educational practices.

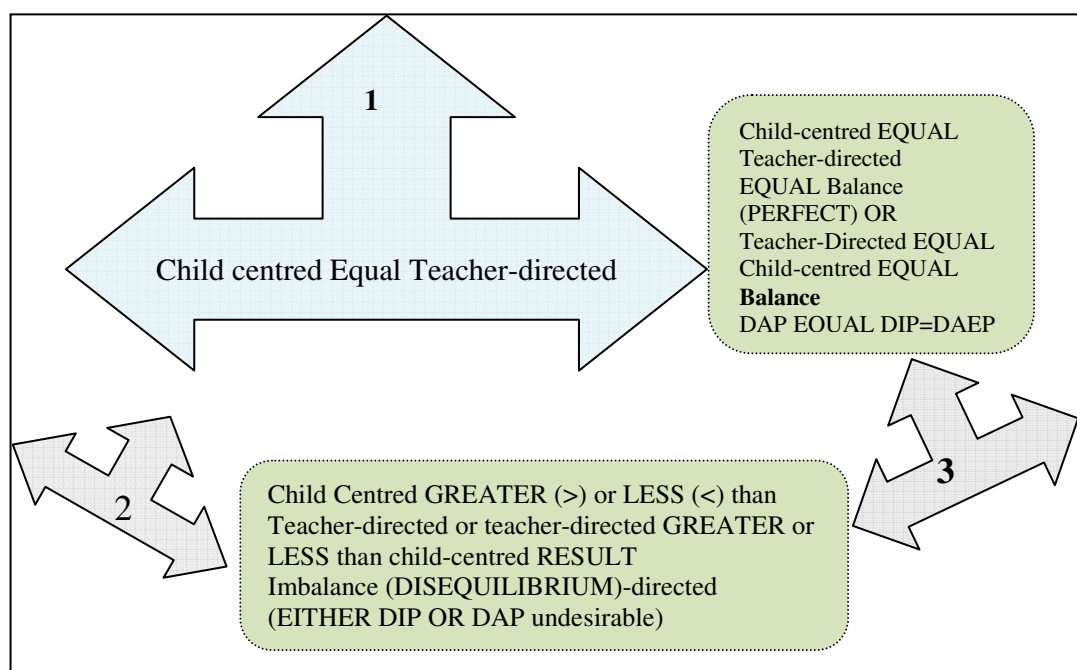


FIGURE 51: Different levels of equilibrium/disequilibrium in the Seesaw model between child-centred and teacher-directed activities

At level one, there is a balance between child-centred and teacher-directed activities. At level two and three, there is a state of disequilibrium between child-directed and teacher-centred activities, because of emphasis on either of the components. As will be illustrated at the practical level of how the seesaw model might be applicable to the dynamics of DAEP, these levels will vary accordingly. Approximating DAEP is the ideal. However, in real life, unlike reference to perfect balance attained through matter in the physics seesaw theory, the seesaw model of preschool DAEP might not attain, but can only approximate the perfect balance due to human dynamics involved. Therefore, I am proposing some level of imbalance as necessary, as may be in any situation, depending on the social dynamics in context.

Following discussion of the four components of children's educational experiences, I seek to advance a seesaw model that balances the four components. These are the *child's developmental needs* (attained by including principles of child development), *teacher decisions*, the *school demands* (to empower the teacher and the school as the school administration as custodians of accountable process of learning), the *social demands* and political needs (parents and political as agents of the implementation of the education policy).

These forces are requisite to a more realistic DAEP approach. In the absence of a balance, any of the components are likely to suffer. For example, a focus on the school culture, together with the social demands and child needs, leads to absence of the teacher in the education of experiences of the child. Teacher decisions, social demands and the child demands lead to a lessening of the school's role in children's educational experiences, and yet it is the society's custodian for implementing the education agenda. A focus on teachers, school culture and children's needs leads to a DAEP framework that the wider community desires. However, it disregards parents' concerns for their children's developmental needs, with parents being the intermediate appraisers of the child's development, as they also bear long-term consequences of mistakes in the education. Smidt affirms the need to involve parents:

You can be left in little doubt that it is generally considered to be 'a good thing' for parents and carers to be immediately involved with schools and settings which care for and educate their children (2007:168).

Katz (1995) adds that the challenge of implementing ‘appropriate’ pedagogy is to align parents understanding, expectations and preferences with appropriate pedagogy. Therefore, in line with community empowerment for preschool education parents ought to be involved with the care and education of their children (Katz, 1995:115; Smidt, 2007: 168). This can be done at two levels; namely at a policy and practical level. At the former, parents or their representatives need to have a say on what their children learn at school in developing the curriculum. At the latter level, the content of the curriculum should be agreeable to all stakeholders for a DAEP framework that works. Once there is a curriculum framework, external forces that teachers face ought to be minimal.

However, Smidt (2007:172-3) acknowledges that it is problematic to involve parents in situations where their roles or reasons for their parental involvement are unclear. A negative childcare attitude towards parents hinders nurturing a working relationship with them. Consequently, derived from the above components necessary for the developments of a workable DAEP, I propose three models of a seesaw that embrace various levels of emphasis, in line with stakeholder consensus. The explanations of the different levels of equilibration follow.

7.4.4 DIFFERENT LEVELS OF EQUILIBRIUM

There emerges from teachers’ beliefs, children’s educational experiences and the factors that influence their beliefs, a relationship that fits into a seesaw model. From my study, the seesaw model oscillates between the teachers putting emphasis on worksheet-based tasks for the children in practice and, conceptually, other research findings. Teachers’ beliefs indicate an emphasis on a child-centred approach to teaching.

Why do I frame it as a seesaw?

- Teachers think DAP but act in a contrary way
- Theoretical literature suggests DAP but empirical research suggests the contrary. Literature on DAP has mixed findings of DAP thinking-DIP acting.
- There is a need to provide a balance between academic subjects and playful learning. This is the new dispensation that not only allows children to develop as children, but which also prepares them for future school success through deliberate steps to blend skills and play (Stipek, 2007).

7.4.5 RELATING THE SEESAW MODEL TO DAP

An equilibrated view of developmentally appropriate practices suggests an approximate balance between the methods through which children learn best, a child-friendly learning atmosphere, and the involvement of parents in their children's learning. The implication is that learning opportunities for children should consider both activity-based learning, as well as parents' aspiration for their children's education in a culturally sensitive environment. In addition, the identified country priorities (as defined by policy frameworks), should be included. I suggest that teachers' concerns, as the primary stakeholders, ought to form part of the DAP principles.

As mentioned, DAP itself is a contestable, even a difficult concept to grasp, given its lack of specific processes through which to attain appropriate method and content (Grisham-Brown *et al.*, 2005:21). Thus, a universally acceptable DAP would be difficult to attain. Consequently, due to varying social needs and focus of education in different contexts, in addition to stakeholder variability, without a framework to interpret and formulate what is DAP, a disjuncture arises between the destination (DAP) and the means to attain content. Moreover, there is lack of precise methods of teaching standards (Wien, in Goldstein, 2007b:380). In addition, as mentioned, what is missing in DAP is the actual *educational* component of what three-to-five-year-old children ought to learn, except for the largely ambiguous and relative expectations for school readiness.

Therefore, as part of an attempt to clarify context variables in the application of the DAP framework; I propose various dynamics of the seesaw which includes an explicit mention of the *educational* component, hence DAEP, as will be illustrated in the following sub-sections. These levels are: the teacher-centred positive-negative model (TC-PNM-DAEP), the child-centred positive-negative model (CC-PNM-DAEP), and the teacher-child centred positive-positive model (TC-CC-PPM-DAEP). The first two models are negative while the last one approximates a positive model. The detailed explanation of the seesaw models follow.

7.4.6 TEACHER-CENTRED- POSITIVE-NEGATIVE-DAEP MODEL (TC-PNM-DAEP)

In this model, I propose a seesaw model whereby the learning tasks are teacher centred, where the teacher puts emphasis on worksheet-based tasks. In this model, as in my study,

the child is succeeding at completing the learning tasks proficiently, through memorization and perhaps rote-learning. Stipek (2004:563) found that children from low income families benefited from direct instruction, while Stipek *et al.* (1995:220) conclude that letter and word recognition is effectively taught through teacher-directed approaches. However, a teacher-centred approach which also emphasizes structured worksheet-based lessons (Bagdi, 2004:203; Frost, 2003:30; Kluger & Park, 2001:50; Miller, 2005:257; Nutbrown, 2002:1-3; Palmer, 2005:26 & Wesley & Buysse, 2003:351) in addition to testing (Burke & Burke, 2005:282; Morrison, 2006:78) and long hours of centre-based care, increases aggressive behaviour and disobedience among children (Belsky, 2006:103-4; NICHD, 2003:998). In addition, according to research, academic focused learning produce transient and short-term academic gains (Monighan-Nourot, 2005:25) that may not be stable over time (Goodman & Sianesi, 2005:534). Apart from surface learning, academic emphasis could also lead to later socio-emotional problems, as teachers give little attention to children's social and emotional needs (Kostelnik *et al.*, 2004:41). Teacher-directed approaches compromise the child's creative development (Zeng & Zeng, 2005:712) as well as their personal efficacy, competence, and pride in accomplishments (Stipek *et al.*, 1995:220).

Evidently, there is need for teacher-directed learning, as some types of knowledge, such as facts, concepts, ideas, vocabulary and stories are taught through direct instruction (Stipek *et al.*, 1995:220), while children acquire dispositions and feelings that encompass different levels of sociability and emotional responses through interactions (Katz 1995:102-3; Kieff & Casbergue, 2000:42-43). From these research-based arguments, the model in which the teacher predominantly directs learning has immediate benefits, which turn out negatively in the course of children's later development. That is why I refer to it as a teacher-centred positive negative model of the seesaw (TC-PNM-DAEP). It appears positive in the early stages of development, especially as relates academic success, but children do not direct their own learning, and there is limited knowledge transfer to other situations (Stipek, 2004:563; Zeng & Zeng, 2005:712). Children in didactic environments experience social and emotionally-related problems, such as anxiety, guilt, inferiority and helplessness (Elkind, in Zeng & Zeng, 2005:708).

Therefore, in the teacher-centred positive negative model (TC-PNM-DAEP) of the seesaw, the emphasis on task-based assignments tips the scale towards the teacher's and

society's side, at the expense of play-based activities. Therefore, in the literal sense of weights of a scale, the teacher has more weight (authority) to decide the learning tasks for the children. Moreover, in this model, more task-based worksheets are given to the child. In the interim, the child succeeds in completing the tasks, and this gives satisfaction to both the parents and the teachers. This satisfies the *social demands* of the education system at the expense of the *child's needs* for optimal growth and development.

However, in order to balance the social demands and the child's needs, I propose the downscaling of teacher-directed learning which places emphasis on the social or economic demands of preschool education at the expense of the child's holistic development. In the process of downscaling, I introduce in to the seesaw what I consider as the *moderating activities*. As there is less weight (read emphasis) on the teacher-directed processes, in a *downscaling process*, using the *moderating activities* of increasing child-centred learning activities, the seesaw gets more weight on the side of the child, hence encouraging an holistic approach to child development that embraces both academic and socio-emotional needs through child-centred activities, in an *upscale process*. Figure 52 (below) summarizes the TC-PNM-DAEP.

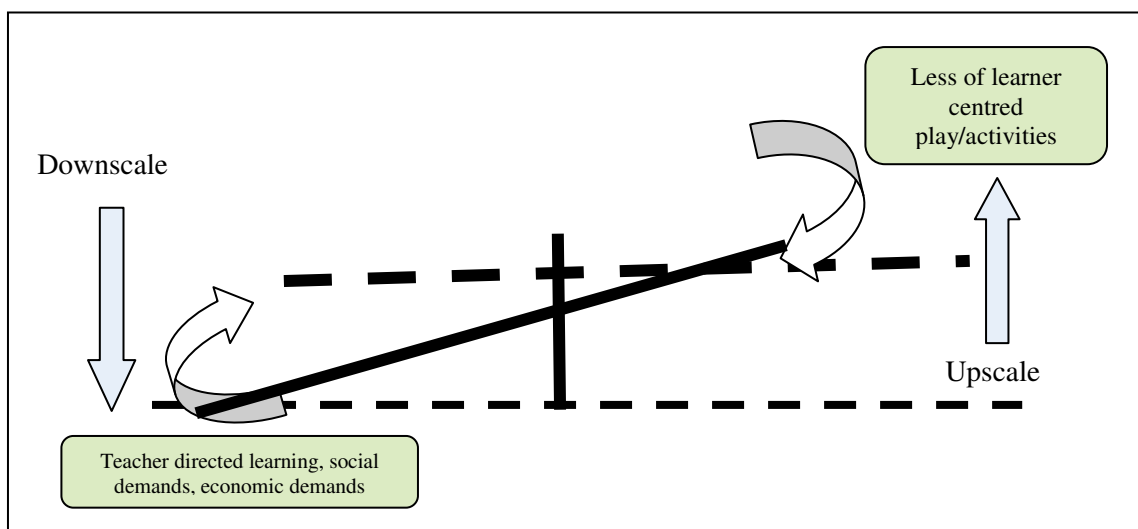


FIGURE 52: Teacher-Centred Positive-Negative Model of DAEP (TC-PNM-DAEP)

7.4.7 CHILD-CENTRED POSITIVE-NEGATIVE -DAEP MODEL

The concern about a child-centred approach in early learning is that play lacks *purpose* because of *aimless* playful activities and lack of accountability for children's

development. Smidt (2007:64) warns: “The issue of play as a mode or way of learning is something anyone involved in learning of young children needs to read about think about and come to understand”. Stipek (2007:741) calls upon ‘good’ teachers to embed the children’s learning experiences in play.

In the CC-PNM-DAEP model, it is a child-centred Positive-Negative model of DAEP (the child seems to be succeeding but negative effects could arise later due to inadequate preparation for learning tasks). The negativity of the model arises from too much play or child-centred activities at the expense of the child’s need to learn and be equipped with appropriate academic content for the future school success. In this model of the seesaw, in the literal sense of weight and authority, the society demands and emphasizes on the child’ need to play as part of the growth process. The negativity of this model is the result of an inadequacy to prepare the child to undertake learning tasks necessary for present and future learning. This arises when society underrates the children’s ability for worksheet-based learning. In order to moderate the weights of the child-centred Positive-Negative model of DAEP (CC-PNM-DAEP), I propose that the child-centred activities reduce in a *downscaling process*, which allows teacher-directed activities to *upscale* through the introduction of worksheet-based tasks, with the aim of preparing the child to fit in to future demands of the school system.

The teacher is central to the moderating process in implementing the moderating activities, as much as parents and other stakeholders are, in acknowledging and supporting the need for such tasks. The objective is to approximate a balance between task and worksheet-based learning and child-centred play-based learning. Figure 53 (below) summarizes the child-centred Positive-Negative model of DAP (CC-PNM-DAEP).

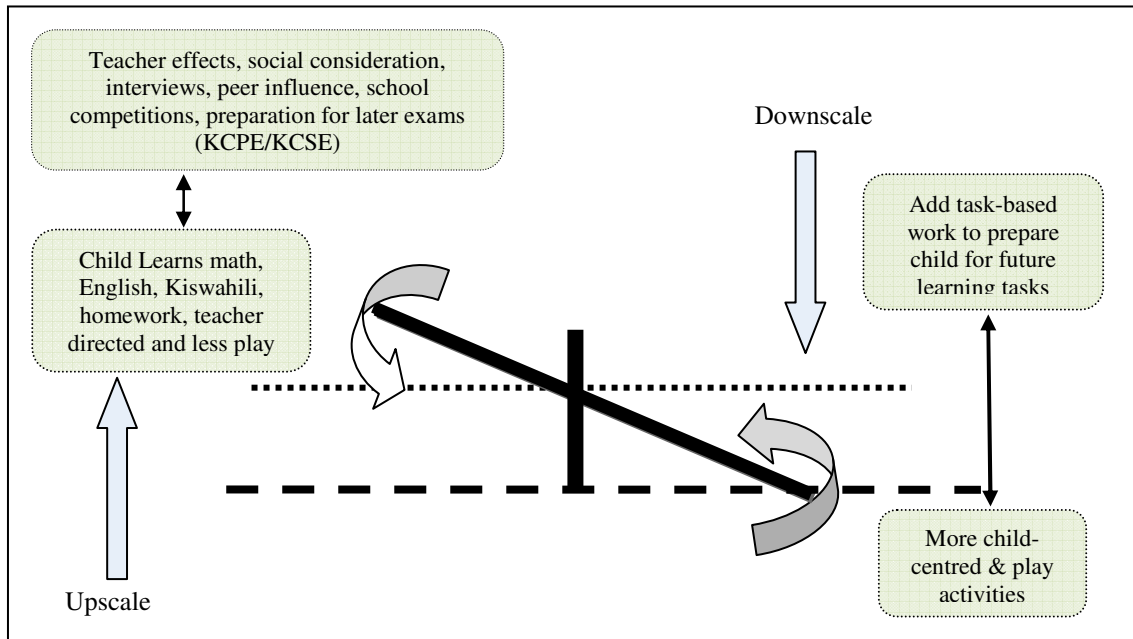


FIGURE 53: Child-Centred Positive-Negative Model of DAEP (CC-PNM-DAEP)

7.4.8 TEACHER-CENTRED, CHILD-CENTRED POSITIVE-POSITIVE DAEP MODEL

A combined balance between teacher-centred and child-centred positive-positive model (TC-CC-PPM-DAEP) requires an upscaling and downscaling process at the same time. In societies where there is much emphasis of the teacher-centred and child-centred positive-positive model of (TC-CC-PPM-DAEP), learning leads to a teacher-centred positive-negative model (TC-PNM-DAEP). In such societies, there is need to downscale academic tasks, while societies that demand a type of learning, leading to a child-centred positive negative model (CC-PNM-DAEP) need to downscale play-based learning, to prepare children for future tasks, as well as to develop in them a school success-oriented ethic. Figure 54 (below) illustrates a near-perfect balance between teacher-directed and child-centred activities TC-CC-PPM-DAEP, which might lead to balanced child development through learning.

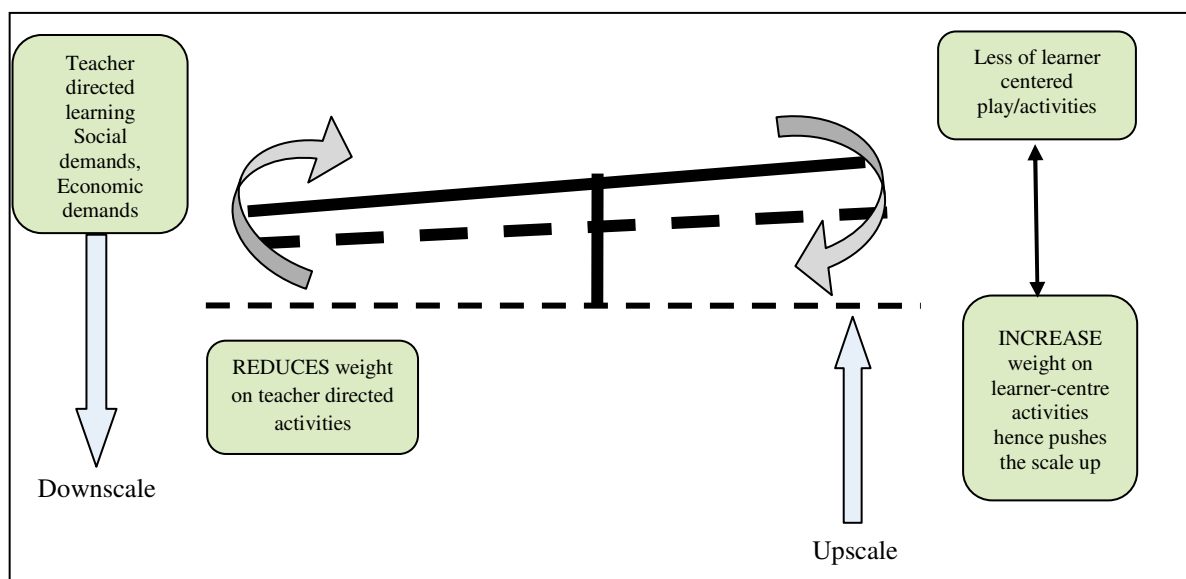


FIGURE 54: Teacher-Centred & Child-centred Positive-Positive Model of DAEP (TC-CC-PPM-DAEP)

In the teacher-centred, positive-negative model (TC-PNM-DAEP), downscaling worksheets accommodate time to upscale child-centred activities, by introducing more play-based learning. In the child-centred positive-negative model (CC-PNM-DAEP), upscaled worksheets downscale child-centred play, hence leaving more time for the child to complete measured tasks as a prerequisite to future success of learning tasks. If the teacher can attain such a balanced seesaw, then one can talk of DAEP. However, this is only possible at a theoretical level, whose feasibility depends on the social demands of an education system. But since most societies need functional children who develop effectively, this seesaw model might offer guiding principles of ensuring the success of children's future learning.

7.4.9 A CONCLUSION ABOUT THE SEESAW MODEL

In advancing the seesaw model of DAEP, the aim is to offer critical bases upon which early childhood programmes can approximate DAEP, without much contestation that arises from social and political agenda of preschool contexts. Through the DAEP seesaw model, each social system can upscale or downscale its components to provide a consensual approach, as to what stakeholders consider as their own definition of DAEP. In this way, the seesaw model aims at embracing multiple realities for which DAEP might have been initially criticized (Kostelnik *et al.*, 2004:25).



A brief sojourn after voyage seven

In this voyage, I have taken showed you how the teachers navigated the terrain of the 12 principles of DAP that were applicable to the study.

As we travelled along with them, they identified the territory of most of the twelve principles, although the map showing some principles observed in children's educational experiences were more prominent.

As we traversed the literature territory, I demonstrated how data fits into the lens of the different levels of the bioecological systems theory.

Towards the end of this voyage, I loop back our journey's experiences with others gone before us to demonstrate how the teachers experiences, as interpreted from the social context, fit into a seesaw model.

This model helps us to navigate other terrains, beyond the research context using the DAP framework. The following voyage concludes the study based on the research questions guiding the study, as it also makes recommendations for further research.