

VOYAGE FIVE DATA ON CHILDREN'S EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES



Coming up in voyage five

Themes related to practical experiences on the following DAP-related constructs:

Teaching strategy

Silencing / use of learning materials

Scheduling of children's educational experiences

Assessment

Consideration for children's individuality

Come now, as we reflect, on what our eyes saw and what the ears heard,

*That we can feel and hear answers, to the questions
pondered...at the start of this long journey, guiding and
lighting the way*

of the present, journey...

Because in it could be other different journeys...

5.1 THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS RE-STATED

I recall the main research question posed in voyage one:

How do preschool teachers' practical experiences frame their beliefs, understanding, and interpretation of developmentally appropriate educational practices?

In addressing this question, I posed four sub-questions:

1. How do preschool teachers interpret developmentally appropriate educational practices?
2. How do preschool teachers' interpretation of developmentally appropriate practices express in their interaction with children?
3. What are the beliefs influencing teacher perception and interpretation of developmentally appropriate practices?
4. What are some of the factors influencing such beliefs?

5.2 A GENERAL INTRODUCTION AND MIND-MAPPING

The sub-questions guide the discussion of the themes organised to respond to the main research question. Specifically, apart from question four, which I address independently in chapter six, I seek to integrate questions 1-3 in a nested approach around the themes that emerged, rather than respond to each of them sequentially (see figure 18). This chapter embeds emerging teachers' beliefs within teachers and children's practical experiences, as captured through interviews and observations respectively. The two methods are discussed in detail in voyage three. Therefore, rather than present children's educational experiences separately from teachers' beliefs, understanding, and interpretations, I juxtapose them to provide the context for the discussion of the emerging beliefs. Consequently, I present the emerging practical experiences under each of the five DAEP-related constructs, together with the interpretation and the emerging beliefs, discerned from teachers' comments that relate to the DAP template. Figure 18 (below) illustrates a nested approach to the discussion.

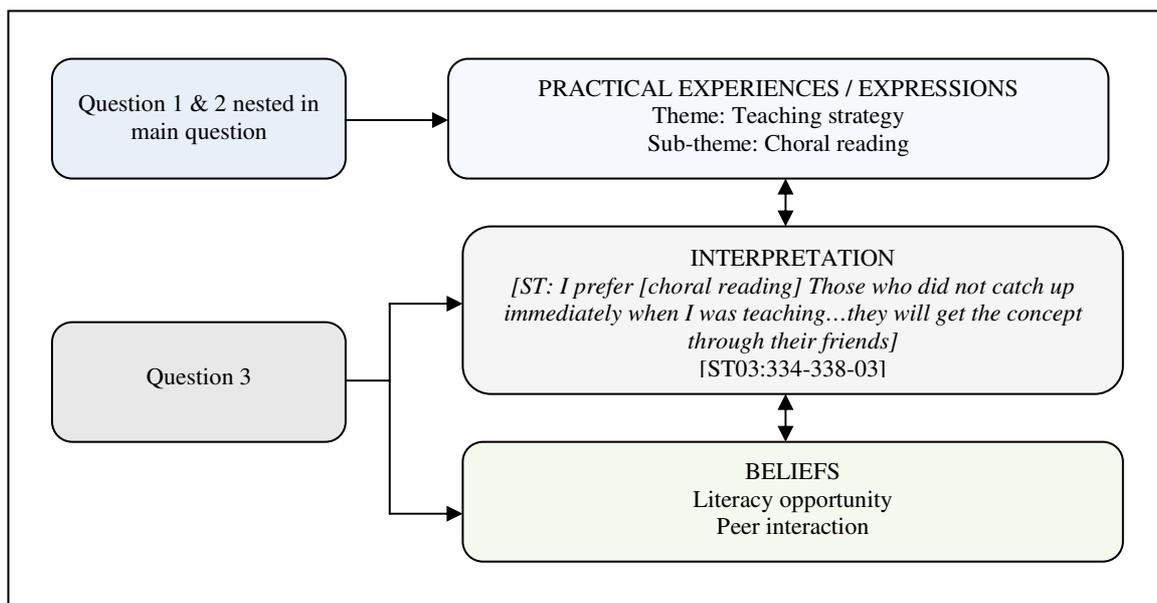


FIGURE 18: An illustration of a nested approach to address the research questions

Although a context-specific data presentation format could have been ideal to reflect the case study design used, a nested approach that combines both the children’s educational experiences and teachers’ emerging beliefs is adopted because the majority of the emerging themes were similar. I assumed that this was how beliefs, understanding and interpretation of children’s educational experiences could emerge from teacher nuances during the interviews. Themes are organized around five DAEP constructs, namely teaching strategy, use of materials in one class and ‘silencing’ of materials²⁷ in three classes, scheduling of learning tasks, the teachers’ approaches to the assessment of children’s learning tasks, and attention given to children’s individual differences and how each theme relates to their educational experiences. (Refer to figure 19 {below} for a summary of the themes and sub-themes derived for the study).

²⁷ Throughout the discussion, I use the metaphor ‘silencing of materials’ to indicate that all the observed classes had materials, but only one teacher out of the four observed engaged children with them (see section 5.4.3). The metaphor of the teachers ‘silencing’ materials derives from the active process where they might have deliberately chosen not to use the materials, even though these were available in their classes.

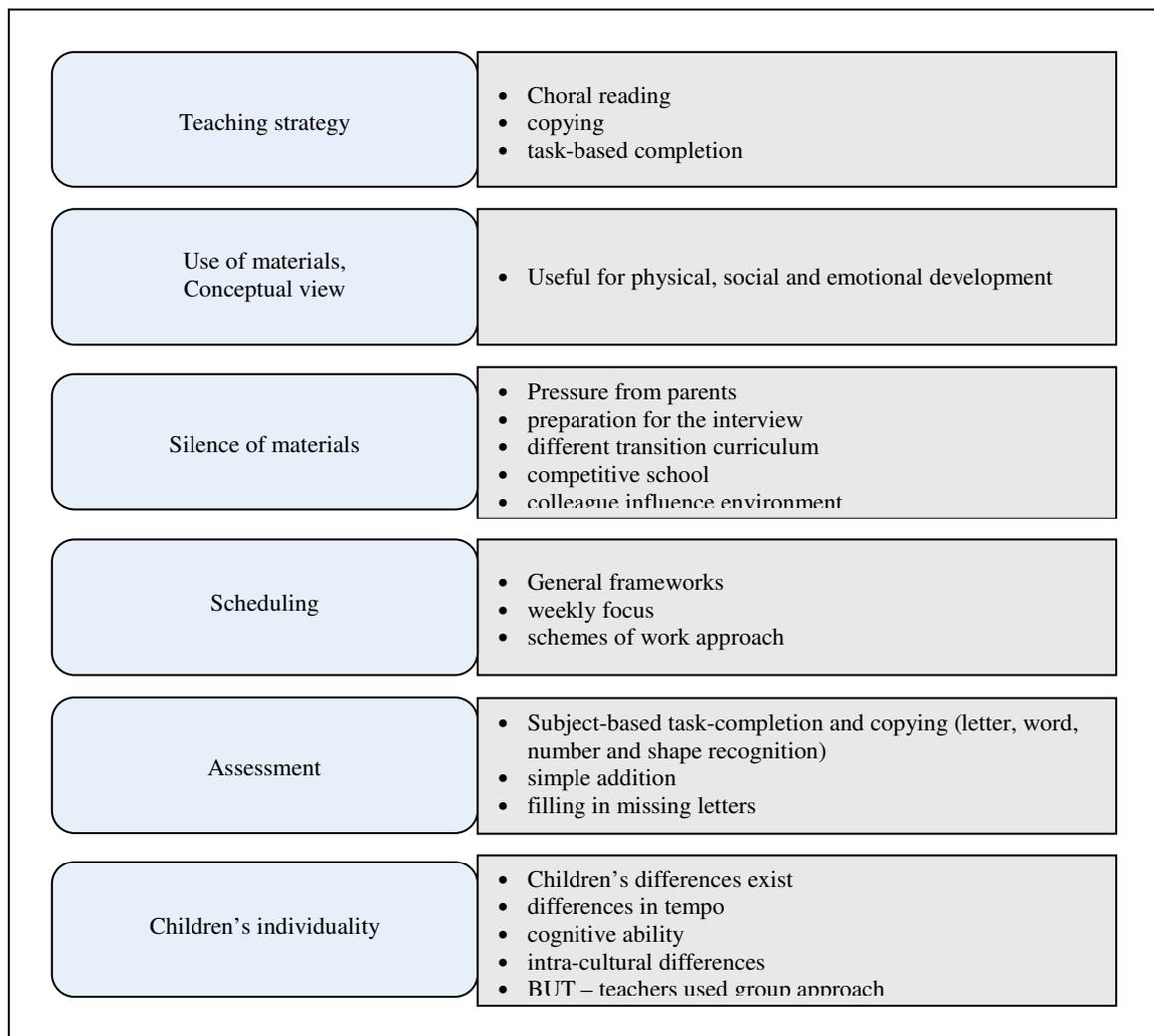


FIGURE 19: A concept map of the emerging themes and sub-themes

5.3 THEME 1: TEACHING STRATEGY

Learning and teaching should not stand on opposite banks and just watch the river flow by; instead, they should embark in a journey down the water. Through an active reciprocal exchange, teaching can strengthen learning how to learn (Mallaguzi, 1998:83).

Teaching strategies “are the procedures, processes, activities and tools used to assist in learning...encompass[ing] a wide range of actions... situated across a variety of contexts” (Miller, 2008:963). This definition of teaching appears to reflect a DAP approach. Sugrue (1997:3) states that in different contexts, different terminology is used for ‘teaching’. For example, the USA and Canada use the term ‘instruction’, while Britain and Australia refer to it as ‘teaching’ (Hargreaves in Sugrue, 1997:3). However,

Sugrue (1997) identifies three elements central to the notion of teaching applicable to my discussion: “a teacher, a student and some content” which entwines with learning. MacNaughton and Williams (2004) present several teaching strategies commonly used in early childhood environments. Among these is collecting, scheduling, demonstrating, describing, encouraging, facilitation, feedback, grouping, listening, modelling, positioning and questioning. In the following discussion, therefore, I use the term ‘teaching strategy’ to refer to the totality of activities and actions experienced by the children in their classrooms, which involved some form of learning. Figure 20 (below) illustrates the two themes that emerged for teaching strategy.

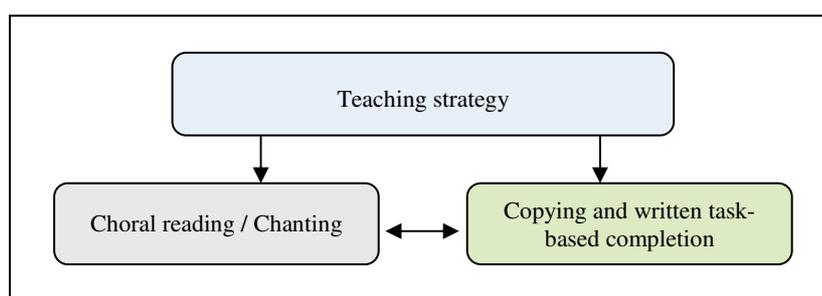


FIGURE 20: Sub-themes related to teaching strategy

5.3.1 DEFINITIONS OF SUB-THEMES RELATED TO TEACHING STRATEGY

There were a few other anecdotal strategies, such as story-reading, demonstrations and a single colouring lesson (MONMID), experience-based story telling (DICTOP), and free play (DICMID)²⁸. However, the teachers mostly used *choral reading*, *copying and written task-based completion* on a daily basis. Free play as an exceptional theme used by Belinda will be discussed separately (see section 5.4.3). Figure 21 (below) is a description of each of these two themes discussed in this section.

THEME ONE : TEACHING STRATEGY	
Sub-Themes common to all classes	<i>Description of themes</i>
Choral reading through modelling	<i>The teacher or another child illustrates an example before the children are allowed to do it alone. The children read loud picture words, letters of the alphabet, counting numbers etc.</i>

²⁸ See Voyage four for detailed directions for accessing data.

THEME ONE : TEACHING STRATEGY	
Copying and written task-based completion	<i>Children copy work in their workbook,, sometimes the work has already been written by the teacher in the children’s exercise books. The teacher writes something on the chalkboard or in children’s books with right or wrong answers for children to complete.</i>

FIGURE 21: Definition of teaching strategy themes

5.3.2 CHORAL READING THROUGH MODELLING

Language is a social construct...in order for language and literacy to be cultivated in young children; two essential experiences need to occur. Children need to talk with and listen to others, and they need to read with others (Seefeldt & Wasik, 2006:207).

Choral reading is an activity in which the leading child or the teacher takes a frontal position to model different learning activities, such as to identify colours, words or picture words, letters, numbers and number values, whilst shouting its identity aloud, as the rest of the children chant. MacNaughton and Williams (2004:125) define modelling as “a process through which children learn how to behave by copying (modelling) the behaviour of others”. In addition, Neisworth and Buggey (2005:193) refer to it as “presenting an example to be imitated”. Although modelling often refers to some social behaviour (Sroufe, Cooper & DeHart, 1996:18-19), in this study, I extend its use to include instances where teacher demonstrations precede opportunities for children to engage with the task alone.

Therefore, I extend the use of ‘modelling’ to include the cognitive dimension of repetitive reading of words or concepts in the ‘choral chanting’ process. Images 1-5 illustrate some of the choral activities. Neisworth and Buggey (2005:193) suggest that children copy the behaviour of models that they perceive ‘to be like them’. In addition, current neurological research suggests that modelling behaviour is not only about seeing the action, but that a person’s brain “mimics other people’s actions even if [not consciously]... especially if later performance is required, which seems to clarify the importance of observational learning” (Blakemore & Frith, 2005:463). Modelled choral activities were a common strategy used by all the teachers in this study. These included daily reading of charts displayed on the wall, writings on the chalkboard, or sandpaper

letters and wooden chips.²⁹

Image 1 and 2 (figure 22, below) illustrate different child-led choral activities in Lenora’s and Stella’s classes respectively. By using the pointing rod (refer to image 1&4), the lead child modelled the reading behaviour to others who participated in turns. Kostelnik *et al.* (2004:322) emphasize the role of modelling in children’s educational experiences, that ought to include opportunities ‘that involve children’s watching others read and write, interacting with a more experienced person (teacher, parent, peer) in literary activities, and to working alone to practice skill building’. Choral activities provided role-modelling opportunities, as illustrated by images 1-6 during choral sessions.

Image 1: A child leads others through a choral session



Image 2: Another child leads others through a colour identification session



Image 3: A wall chart with picture words referenced in choral activities



Image 4: Another set of Kiswahili sentences referenced in choral activities

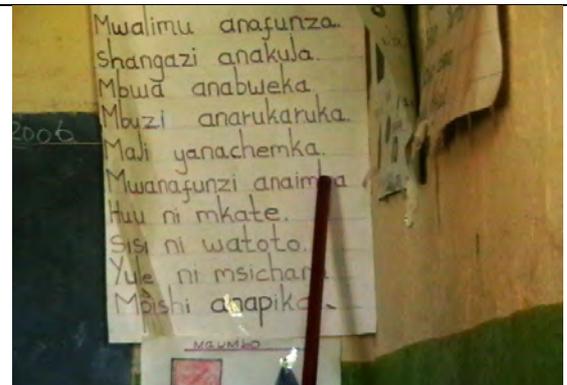


Image 5: Another set of choral activities ‘permanently’ available on the chalkboard

Image 6: Another child leads others in a choral activity

²⁹ (See addendum 12 for assorted choral activities and figure 22 for images that illustrate choral reading. Also, see the summary of emerging beliefs from figures 23 & 24 and addendum nine for an illustration of a choral session. Additional data of children’s educational experiences is in addendum 11.)



FIGURE 22: Images 1-6: Illustrations of choral reading sessions and content

Teachers’ beliefs emerging from the choral activities include the development of children’s literacy to prepare children for transition to primary school, opportunities to provide variety-reading tasks and to develop confidence to approach learning tasks. In addition, through choral activities, children interact socially, as they learn from each other through modelling (figures 23 and 24 {below} illustrate the emerging themes).

Teacher	(Practical experiences- Choral reading)	Illustration of emerging belief	Example of emerging belief
Belinda’s class	Teacher picks a rod and leads children to read the letters of the alphabet and colour identification, before giving lead-children opportunity to do the same [Ref to video clip- DICMID clip 6, addendum]	<i>[So like when you use A for Apple, so they see apple, there and letter A] [BE01:22]Before a child knows how to read, they just look at the picture and say but they will have known the words, they just say the words... it helps them to know how to read. [BE01:24; 112; 114; 116; 120; 122]</i>	Opportunity for literacy development
Lenora’s class	The lead child leads the children to read various charts displayed on the wall (ref images 1-12)	<i>[... Yah after reading every day until, they... they catch them well[LE01A:868; 892] [LE: Yah when we go to the written work now the children have no more problems] [LE01B:58]</i>	Literacy development through repetition Smooth transition to written activities

FIGURE 23: Children’s choral reading educational experiences & teachers’ emerging beliefs: DICECE preschool

Teacher	(Practical experiences Choral reading)	Illustration of emerging belief	Example of emerging belief
Stella's class	The lead child Picks different items from a wooden box, showing it to the class as she/he identifies whatever she/he has picked, shouts its identity and puts aside the item	<i>[ST: Okay, I prefer [Choral reading] so I prefer for those who did not catch up immediately when I was teaching...they will get the concept through their friends [ST03:334-338-03]</i>	Peer learning
Enid's class	Lead child: Bread (holding out the picture card): Class: Bread Lead child: can you spell the word bread? Class: b/r/e/a/ d/-Bread; Class: Rain Lead child: can you spell the word, rain?	<i>If we are doing English we have to read first and they have to copy what they have read, they just have to copy it at least it helps them in reading and they will keep on remembering [EN02:107; 113; 115]</i>	Smooth transition to written activities and acts as memory strategy during writing activities

FIGURE 24: Children's choral reading educational experiences & teachers' emerging beliefs: Montessori preschool

From their comments (figure 23 and 24 above), Lenora and Enid appeared to emphasize their beliefs that choral reading provides for the smooth transition between reading and writing activities, as it also acts as a memory strategy for the children. They appeared to believe that as children read the words repetitively, it becomes easier for them to remember these words as they write them down in their exercise books. To reinforce their beliefs, all the teachers in this study, except Enid, who used the chalkboard daily, referred to work on it that remained unchanged for most of the study period; some for the last six years (see Lenora's comment and image 1 and 5 as illustrations). Both Lenora and Enid, who taught in the Top classes, appeared to value work they wrote on the chalkboard as a literacy opportunity for children:

[LE: Yah after reading every day until, they... they catch them well... the words are there permanent, as I told you they have been there for the last six years][LE01A: 868; 892]

[EN: We have to read first and they have to copy what they have read, they just have to copy it at least it helps them in reading and they will keep on remembering. They read and copy it they will read, if you will just find them breaking and reading while writing; at least it helps them in reading [EN02:107; EN02:113; 115]

Therefore, teachers linked both choral reading to writing, appearing to emphasize it as an important literacy opportunity for children. Their sentiments illustrate this interpretation:

[BE...they just look at the picture and say but they will have known the words, they just say the words... it helps them to know how to read. It is a preparation for reading...: to confirm if they have recognized the pictures][BE01:24; 112-122]

[LE: the child should recognize the letter and its sound][LE02: 08]

[ST... [Reading] it also enlarges the nini (thing), of the child, the thinking or brain works...][ST01:294]

[EN: Read the picture with word and then they copy...afterwards, I introduce filling in, as in pictures, then afterwards, that is when I introduce drawing pictures, and then they name, to join the syllabi][EN01:108-109]

In what echoes views from other scholars, such as Yoo (2005:144), Gordon and Browne, (2000:484), and Neuman (in Seefeldt & Wasik, 2006:216), who suggest that children's listening and speech skills are a prerequisite to their reading and writing skills development, teachers in the current study preceded children's written activities with some choral activity. Enid's comment summarizes the approach observed:

[EN: [En: First, you have to make them understand. You have to make them understand first, how to break the syllabi] [EN01:86-88]

5.3.2.1 Choral reading provides children with variable stimulation

Belinda, Lenora and Enid appeared to emphasize the need for variety in the learning activities. As an educational opportunity, choral chanting exposed children to a variety of literacy opportunities (see images 1-6 for an illustration). As mentioned, choral reading engaged children with picture-words and attractive multi-coloured *charts* as part of their literacy educational experiences. In life, it is said, "*a picture is worth a thousand words*". In what appears to express this adage, Belinda, Lenora and Enid believe that picture words enhance children's *literacy acquisition*. Vignette 1 illustrates one of Belinda's approaches to children's educational experiences:

VIGNETTE 1: An illustration of the variety of educational experiences in Belinda's class

The children in this class have sat on child-size tables and chairs. They begin the lesson with a song; singing as they throw out their hands as they also maintain their sitting positions.

The teacher has stood at the front of the class. She starts a rhyme song
Elephant, elephant, where are you?
Because I am too big because I am too big, because I am too big

Another Rhyme:
Kuna mzee kayaba (there is an old man called Kayaba), anaitwa (called) triangle, triangle, rectangle, square, oval, circle, as she sings along with the children.

The teacher then moves to the opposite end to pick a rod, which she uses to point at the written letters at the blackboard as the children repeat loudly after her;

Teacher: Letter A for_
Children: apple,
Teacher: letter b for
Children : boy,
Teacher: letter c for
Children: cat,
Teacher: Letter D for,
Children: duck etc.

To illustrate how Belinda interpreted the activities that incorporated rhymes, shapes, and choral reading of the letters of the alphabet shown in vignette 1, she said:

[BE: This one makes it look attractive; you know children like attractive things ... if you just put there a number, they will have less interest with it but if there is a picture, they will look at the picture and the number, that picture and the number] [BE 92; 94] (Reference image 5: the coloured pictures above the blackboard)

Belinda's remarks express her believe in *variety* choral practices that *stimulate* the children's interest. Belinda's comment in particular captures her belief about the *literacy role* of visually appealing picture-words or picture numbers. Lenora further commented the following regarding the choral activity captured in vignette 2 below:

[... Yah after reading every day until, they... they catch them well] [LE01A: 868; 892]

Therefore, vignette 1 above captures Belinda's experience and her emerging *beliefs* about the *need for sensorial stimulation* for children, while vignette 2 below illustrates another child-led typical choral session and the way children and the teacher experienced the choral process in Lenora's class

VIGNETTE 2: An illustration of a choral session (child-led) in Lenora's class

"It is another day in my observations. I am very happy that it is the end of the week, as look forward to the weekend to view all the video data for the week and for a rest. Teacher Lenora looks very relaxed in my presence today. I have started writing my daily journal.

One child quickly rushes and grabs a rod that he uses to point at the objects in the choral reading activity that he is about to lead. He simply chooses a chart and goes through the words written as he shouts. Naturally, all the children follow suit and read very loudly after him.

The teacher sits at her table to start marking the homework books that the children have just handed in. She is deeply engrossed with her task, until she finishes marking all the work. Meanwhile the children go through voluntary-led rotational choral reading sessions, the only thing that they seem to do at random is their selection of charts hung on the wall and the word pictures written on the blackboard. It has been about fifty minutes since she started marking, she looks up to see what the children are doing.

Meantime the teacher has punctuated her marking with some non-specifically directed verbal remarks "some of you are not reading". Actually, some children occasionally get distracted with my presence and look at me, but briefly.

Nuanced:

I am somewhat surprised by the children's choice of activity. Whereas I thought the children had other options to use the locally available material stored away in a white cupboard by the wall, because of what I think constitutes free choice, they have not opted for that activity...I wonder why? It is strange that all the children seem to understand what "free choice constitutes". As soon as the children are "freed" by the teacher, one child rushes to lead others in the choral reading activity. Others enthusiastically want to take their turns in leading...

Later... as I interviewed Lenora I seemed to get an answer to my question because she believed this is part of free choice activities. [The quote is based on the activity: **LE: they do whatever they want, mainly; us...by picking the stick one by one; reading what is on the wall; Yah, because you, I can't just... there are no directed activities...**]

Like Belinda, Lenora links choral reading to visual imagery and children's ability to recall. From their comments, both Belinda and Lenora appear to reinforce the ideas of variety, sensorial stimulation, and the use of colour in early learning environments is valuable. To emphasize the value of visuals in memory, Blakemore and Frith (2005:463) note, "...visual imagery, of visualization, is powerful – most people can actually control their 'mind's eye' and use it to have a look around the corners of their living room to count the pictures in their head".

Although Stella did not associate words and pictures, she observed that choral reading enhances 'children's brain work' or thinking [ST01:294], in what appears to illustrate her view on the cognitive benefits of choral reading to the children. Besides, she equally engaged children in a variety of choral activities as part of their educational experiences.

Therefore, these teachers believe that through picture-words or ‘picture reading’ (Seefeldt & Wasik, 2006:214) children acquire literacy skills. All the preschool classrooms in the study had a variety of multi-coloured charts and picture words consistent with the observation by Prochner *et al.* (2008:193), that the Indian preschool in their study had similar educational posters. By engaging children in multicoloured charts, the teachers appeared to embrace this *multisensory stimulation* principle.

Kostelnik *et al.*, (2004:74) underline the need for children to have firsthand sensorial stimulation; as “all learning begins with perception; seeing, hearing, touching, tasting and smelling. According to the developmentally appropriate template, children learn best through engaging all their senses” (Blakemore & Frith, 2005:461; Bredekamp & Copple, 1997:125; Broadhead, 2001:34; Crowther & Wellhousen, 2004:185; Montessori, 1920:23).

Environmental print enhances children’s literacy (Beaty, 1996:125; Gordon & Browne, 2000:481; Kostelnik *et al.*, 2004:311; Seefeldt & Wasik, 2006:211). Therefore, the positive effects of sensorial stimulation, as emphasized by vignette 1 and 2 from Lenora’ and Belinda’s classes, reflect the recommendation for an early childhood environment that stimulates children’s interest to learn (Blakemore & Frith, 2005:461; Bredekamp & Copple, 1997:125; Broadhead, 2001:34; Crowther & Wellhousen, 2004:185; Montessori, 1899:23). In addition, the emotional effect of colour on the children’s activity level and teaching objectives is important to their emotional responses. Crowther and Wellhousen write:

Colour can elicit both a learnt and behavioural response. Therefore, children’s educational experiences that engage them with variety and a colourful environment are important. Bright primary colours stimulate and excite, while pale warm colours have a calming soothing and relaxing effect (2004:31-2).

Consequently, teachers embraced a ‘multi-sensory’ principle by engaging children with charts (see addendum 12). However, apart from colourful picture words and number charts that varied the *reading* activities in the learning environment, Belinda used rhymes, songs and free play in little variations³⁰.

³⁰ Belinda was the only teacher who facilitated free play on a daily basis; hence her unique approach which set her apart from the rest of the teachers is discussed under section 5.4.3.

5.3.2.2 Choral reading provides children opportunity to develop confidence

Apart from the *educational benefits* of choral reading, from their sentiments, the teachers believed that choral reading also has *social benefits* for the children. Enid's sentiments illustrate the view that through choral reading (especially frontal choral reading) children develop *confidence* and a positive *self-esteem* to approach learning tasks. Belinda and Stella linked choral reading to opportunities for peer interaction and learning. Their comments corroborate this interpretation:

[BE: Yea, that one [another child leading]- so that children can be attentive to fellow children than to an adult... they get that interest if they see another child can read][BE01: 26; 28]

[ST:...[children] familiarize themselves also to the rest of the class... have the ability to volunteer to do the work...after seeing their friends doing the work, it also awakens those who are shy... we don't have to force...][ST01:288; 290]

[EN: Okay you will learn that this child will learn to be independent... free to talk, and the eeh fear, you know we have some children who fear talking in front of people... at least they will have that confidence of talking, and courage, they know that I know it][EN03:22-24; 40-46]

Teachers believed choral reading provides children with differential abilities to *learn from* each other as they interact. The teachers' beliefs about choral reading as an opportunity for children to develop *literacy skills* in a *social environment* echo Katz's (1995:113) view that learners need to feel good about their learning, and experience acceptance, competence and feedback from both teachers and peers. In addition, Sandberg and Eriksson (2008:5) note that children experience a sense of belonging and high self-esteem when they participate in their learning. Therefore, as participants either as 'chant-leaders' or respondents in the chanting, children have experienced a sense of belonging and peer affirmation, as members of a learning community.

Spodek and Saracho (in Saracho & Spodek, 2003:180), referring to their earlier works, recommend strategies that enhance children's literacy, such as reading regularly and often to them, helping them learn language symbols and modelling reading and writing to them. Moreover, teachers can help children to comprehend meaning in their reading encounters, to learn the signs and symbols in their environment, and to link their reading to their writing (Neuman & Roskos, 2005:25; Foote *et al.*, 2004:140).

By providing children with opportunities to listen, view, speak, read, and write, so that they can apply these skills meaningfully to their lives as part of their literacy

development, teachers' practices were consistent with those of other scholars of literacy development (Foote *et al.*, 2004:143; Gordon & Browne, 2000:484; Neuman, in Seefeldt & Wasik, 2006:216; Neuman & Roskos, 2005:25). Hence, the teachers' beliefs about the use of choral reading and chanting portray a developmentally appropriate template for language development, in which children ought to interact with a print-rich environment (Kostelnik, 2004:331; Foote *et al.*, 2004:139; Neuman & Roskos, 2005:25; Saracho & Spodek, 2003:180; Stipek, 2004:55). However, although children's literacy experiences in the current study involved emphasis on the literacy acquisition limited to reading, listening, speaking and written activities copying (Gordon & Browne, 2000:484), these tasks were *structured for whole group* rather than individual activity. Children had less freedom to talk among themselves, except during free play in Belinda's class (see addendum 15).

Consequently, despite a seemingly DAP approach to literacy, the children had limited opportunities to *comprehend meaning* from their limited chanting *sessions* (Foote *et al.*, 2004:144). Therefore, although the children referred to the charts extensively, they had no opportunities to manipulate literacy-related material. This restricted their experiences to the visual only. Overall, choral reading in all the classes focused on a teacher-initiated, skills-based approach to children's educational experiences, an observation consistent with those of other researchers, such as Jingbo and Elicker (2006:140) and Foote *et al.*, (2004:145).

Consequently, the *exclusive* use of the *choral* approach to literacy, which did not embrace other senses, contrast with the DAP recommendation that children are active learners who must interact with their activities in a multiple number of ways "as they use their bodies as instruments for learning" (Kostelnik *et al.*, 2004:46). Neuman and Roskos (2005:25) warn that children's language literacy is more than letters and sounds, and that mimicking, reciting and repeating as strategies to teach language to children is like "going to the dentist - something they have to do, but not much fun", and largely void of meaningful experiences. Foote *et al.* (2004:144) conclude that simple literacy events that require children to recall, name and identify objects may provide knowledge of literacy, but lack meaningfulness and authenticity. Enid's comments echo the warning that simple chants are not *effective* literacy opportunities for some children:

[EN: Sometimes when a teacher introduces something from the blackboard...I am telling them this is a book they write book. You will find just others they [are] just singing; you say they tell you a book...The next day you say may be the next words is pencil they will tell you pencil like that. They follow what others are saying] [EN04:130-01]

In addition, the *rotational approach* that required every child to participate disregards sensitivity to *children's temperament*. For example, during the lesson on the provinces of Kenya, Stella required a child to volunteer to locate selected ones. However, one child cried when Stella insisted that he should participate (see clip 19 on CD). This intimidated the child, even if the teacher's intentions were positive. Therefore, despite the advantage of rotational participation, in which each child had opportunities to engage with their environment, choral reading is contextually inappropriate, depending on the level of *sensitivity* to children's individual differences.

Regardless, choral reading encouraged all children to participate, including the shy and reserved, albeit reluctantly. As a literacy opportunity, most of the children benefited from choral reading since most had a chance to do it (Kostelnik *et al.*, 2004:333). Children scrambled for choral leadership, which illustrates their enthusiasm. In most instances, the children organized themselves for choral activities, without the teacher's instigation. Often, the leading child got the concepts correct, but even when they were uncertain in identifying a concept, another child quickly chipped in to identify the word, colour or letter.

More so, choral reading presented opportunities for peer affirmation (Kostelnik *et al.*, 2004:48; LeBlanc & Bearison, 2004:501-2), through positive feedback about their abilities and success in activities (MacNaughton & Williams, 2004:99). For example, in most instances, when a child successfully completed a task, there was the 'congratulatory chant' as children sung and clapped 'well done, well done, keep it up – a very good girl'. The girl took the complement as she put her hands akimbo, swinging her waist sideways. This is the way they are used to receiving the compliment (See MONMID clip 10 on CD). Apart from peer affirmation, choral reading maximizes children's idle time. For example, in both Montessori preschool classes, children with a fast tempo waited a short while for a few more children to complete, before embarking on self-chosen choral activities. Children took turns among themselves to lead this activity, demonstrating co-operation among themselves (especially by chanting the responses after the lead-child) and strong

disposition to become literate (Foote *et al.*, 2004:143). Moreover, it may have been an indication of compliance and self-regulation. As observed, any child who did not get support through peer chanting while reading reported the same to the teacher: For example:

Child: Teacher, they [other children] are not chanting after' (see MONMID clip 1, on CD)

In my view, children in this study displayed social and emotional maturity, since there were few incidences of anti-social behaviour. My observation appears to reflect the findings by Massetti and Bracken (2008:11), who demonstrated from their study that children attending literacy-focused classrooms showed lower rates of problem behaviour, as they also outperformed their counterparts attending socio-emotionally focused classrooms. Jingbo and Elicker (2006:140) also report high levels on obedience in Chinese kindergarteners, and they posit some benefits for children attending skills-focused, teacher-directed preschools; punctuality in attending to and completion of school tasks; efficient implementation of educational objectives; and the transmission of knowledge and skills repetitively. However, they also caution that such preschools hinder creative development due to high authority, and development of a callous attitude among children who model highly authoritative non-sympathetic teachers. All these observations equally apply to the current study.

5.3.3 COPYING AND WRITTEN TASK COMPLETION

“Children who have been made to write without anxiety over correct form or spelling often become immensely talented authors in the primary years” (Clay, in Trawick-Smith, 2003:399).

The second sub-theme that emerged as a teaching strategy was copying and task written completion. Both were written activities that included, but were not limited to, copying letters A-Z in small and capital letters, simply copying numbers, copying and naming picture-words, circling the correct word, copying and drawing of both Kiswahili and English items or completing sums³¹ (for an elaboration see footnote five). In most instances, the children copied exactly what the teacher had written, while in other tasks,

³¹ The children in both Baby classes (average three- to four-year-olds) copied and completed tasks (such as copying a series of letters of the alphabet, matching different shapes, simple maths etc) with examples copied for them in their exercise books by their teachers. The children attending both Top classes (average five-year-olds) independently copied work from the chalkboard to their exercise books before completing the tasks.

they completed an English, Maths or Kiswahili task in their exercise books. In some instances, the children were required to fill a whole page of a certain letter, in a repetitive process (see addendum 13 for an illustration of copying activities). Closely related to copying is task completion, which is similar to copying, but in task completion children wrote an assignment with a right or wrong answer (see addendum 14 for an illustration of task-completion activities). Figure 25 and 26 below illustrate some for the practical experiences in the second column in the DICECE and Montessori preschools respectively.

Teacher	(Practical experiences on copying & task-completion)	Illustrations	Illustration of emerging belief
Belinda	Teacher has drawn similar pictures of ball, tree, and banana in each child's books; children to draw alongside each picture and colour it; also copying. [e.g. DICMID CLIP 2 & CLIP 4 on CD]	<i>[BE...you just make them know that they came to school to know how to read and write [BE01:590;594;596;598;600]</i> <i>[“The muscles... he develops the hands in writing; is when he can memorize the letter very well] [BE01:172; 176]</i>	<i>Preschool as an academic environment</i> <i>Writing as a developmental process</i>
Lenora's class	Children draw shapes and complete the names; children change words from capital letters to small letters [see images 16-21]	<i>[It will make them to develop their finger muscles, through painting and colouring [LE01B:897]</i>	<i>Writing as a developmental process</i>

FIGURE 25: An illustration of some beliefs: Copying and written task-completion in DICECE

Teacher	(Practical experiences on copying & task-completion)	Illustrations	Illustration of emerging belief
Stella's class	Teacher writes a letter or several letters or numbers in the children's books and gives the child to copy these repetitively	<p><i>[ST: No. if I am doing math, I would like all my children to be doing math, [ST01:361].</i></p> <p><i>[I wanted to write some work on their books; ...later ... they will write by themselves...there are some who are ahead, some who are behind so I have to go into their books individually and write the work</i></p> <p><i>[ST01:33; 35; 37; 39; 299; 301].</i></p>	<p><i>Subject-based approach to writing</i></p> <p><i>Copying work into the children's book because they are not ready to write and to attend to individual needs</i></p>
Enid's class	<p><i>Soma na uchore</i> (read and copy) Kiswahili picture words</p> <p>Copying letters A-Z & copying numbers 1-50 in a grid</p>	<p><i>Read the picture with word and then they copy...afterwards, I introduce filling in, as in pictures and then afterwards, that is when introduce drawing pictures and then they name, to join the syllabi</i> [EN01:86-88; 108; 110]</p>	<p><i>Progressive development of writing</i></p>

FIGURE 26: An illustration of some beliefs: Copying and written task-completion in Montessori school

While vignette 3 above illustrates a typical copying and task-completion session in Enid's class, Images 7 to 12 below show some examples of the copying and task-completion of children's educational experiences in all the classes.

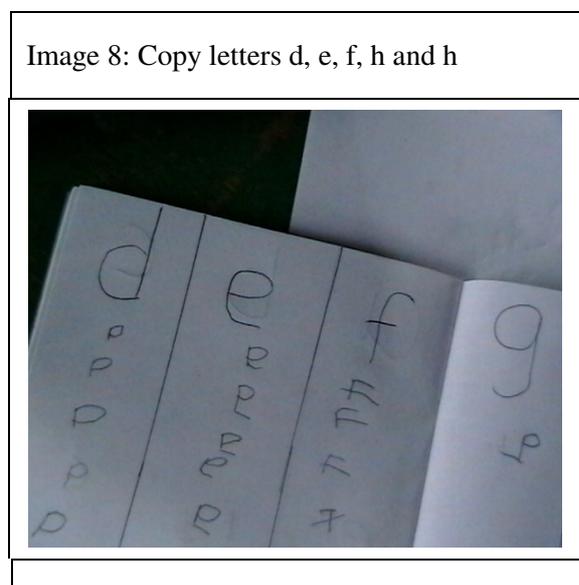
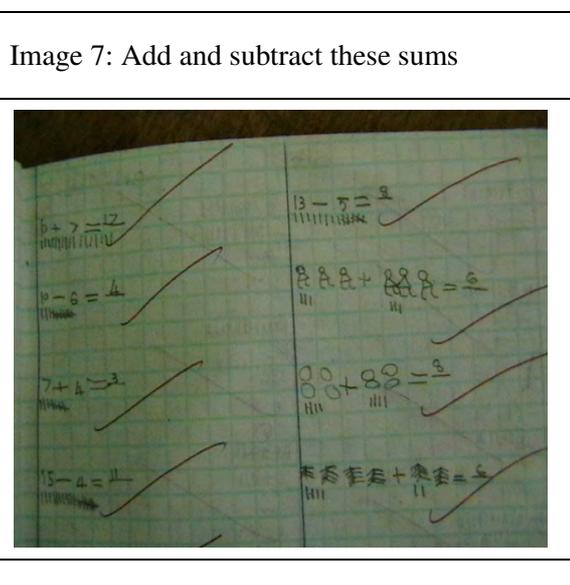


Image 9: Some Kiswahili copying tasks



Image 10: Match these numbers and shapes



Image 11: Copy numbers 7 and 8

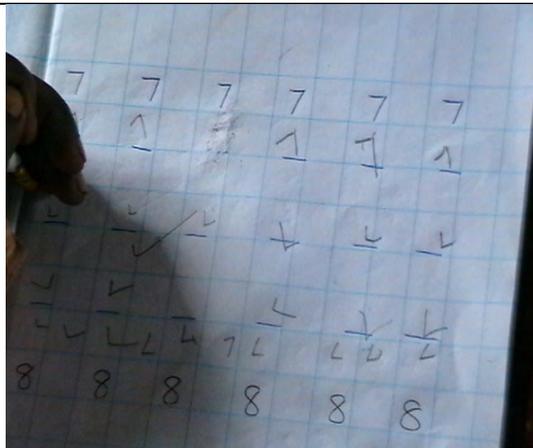


Image 12: Children in a copying and task completion session



FIGURE 27: Images 7-12 of sample of copying and task-completion activities

VIGNETTE 3: Typical rhythm of observed activities in Enid's class

Today my participating teacher has a white dotted top, and a matching black trouser on. She has a scarf to ward off the morning cold. The class I am observing has 26 children today. They were thirty yesterday. The children sound dull today, displaying little of the enthusiasm observed the previous day. Could it be perhaps because of the cold morning? Maybe... I can also sense a level of boredom today. I did not feel yesterday. In fact, one girl and one boy have their heads drooped over the table.

The teacher moves from her desk, located further back at the classroom, to the front to write some work on the blackboard. The first activity involves reading words, such as; aunt, box, once, what, they, you, have, tough, fruits, there, etc. Another activity involves reading sentences. 'I have a pen'; 'what is your name?' 'They can sing'; etc. The teacher covers the rest of the lesson by giving the children a written task. One session of the DVD ends. I decide to wait for another different activity to capture, because the children are still doing the same activity... In total, for this session alone, I count 40 items for the children to complete in the next 30 to 40 minutes before tea break.

I also notice that some children consistently complete their work fast, spending less than fifteen minutes to complete the task, while others, about four of them, take more time. They are clearly struggling. Those children, who finished their work and submitted it for marking, got back to their tables to sit, and relax. Other children seem to be struggling to complete the work. The teacher moves round the whole class supervising the children's work, but she is particular with the latter group, whom she has assembled at one row, perhaps for close supervision. At times, she even rubs their work for them.

The sense of order in this class is palpable. As the children queue to present their work for marking, they do so in much silence, uncharacteristic of a preschool! Their discipline is unrivalled, as they line up to present work. None of them cuts the queue or makes undue noise. Neither is there any shoving, only inaudible whispers of "move back" (to ease the space on the queue), as they advance towards the teacher's table in turn.

As the tea-girl brings in the tea, already in mugs and the slices of bread on separate trays, the teacher asks the children to suspend their work so that they can take their tea. They say a short prayer before their snack of tea and two slices of bread. Again, I observe the same high sense of order as the children each pick one mug of tea and two slices of bread. As the children finish their tea, each one of them drops off their mugs, at a pail placed near the exit passage of the classroom, and quickly rush back to complete their work. Their tea break lasts about twenty minutes. Meanwhile, teacher Enid copies seventeen simple sums on the chalkboard, eight sums to add up and nine sums to subtract.

Three beliefs appeared to reinforce the copying and written task-based activities: *writing as a developmental process*, the need to provide *parents with feedback*, and the preparation for *school transition*. Although these processes link, I discuss each of them separately to capture teacher nuances as they relates to each. These are the belief themes considered in this section.

5.3.3.1 Copying and written task-based completion as a developmental process

Lenora, Belinda and Enid relate copying and task-completion as a developmentally appropriate educational strategy for children to develop their writing skill through repetitive writing. Repetitive writing seems to reinforce the teachers' beliefs about writing as a developmental process. For example, Belinda's comment illustrates the

belief in the principle of proximal-distal motor development, in which development of writing control, proceeds from the shoulder-arm-wrist and finger muscle sequence, as children gain progressive control of the tripod-positioning of the fingers, necessary for developed writing (Kostelnik *et al.*, 204:352). Lenora added:

[BE: The muscles... he develops the hands in writing;[repetitive writing] is when he can memorize the letter very well] [BE01: 172; 176]

[LE... when these children do this painting, printing, makes that child to like school and to prepare this, as I told you, it will make them to develop their finger muscles, through painting and colouring][LE01B: 897]

All children wrote in their books, except those in Belinda's class, who used additional slates and chalk to scribble (refer to addendum 15). Belinda's comments, based on children's slate writing activity, reinforces her belief in writing as a developmental process that enhances children's physical dexterity as well as the memorization of learning tasks.

Writing as a developmental process in children proceeds through three stages; beginning at the prephonemic stage, children use random letters, through the phonemic stage, as they use consonants to stand for complete words, and the final conventional writing stage during the transitional stage (Trawick-Smith, 2003:398). Lamme (in Charlesworth, 2008:354-355) adds six requisite skills to writing: small muscle development, eye-hand coordination, ability to hold a writing tool, ability to make basic strokes, letter perception and orientation to printed language.

However, in what appeared to pre-empt the full cycle development of the stages outlined, children copied work already written by their teachers. Although the teachers believed that children developed their writing skill through stages, their approach that restricted children to copying compromises full development of the writing cycle. Copying 'ready letters' tends to reinforce the conventional stage at the expense of the pre-phonemic and phonemic stages, because the children in both baby classes copied work already written by the teacher (Trawick-Smith, 2003:398). Charlesworth (2008:354) warns children are learning writing at earlier before they can comprehend written work.

The practice of copying and written task completion expresses a belief that children's work needs to reflect the primary school transition, a belief theme that I turn to next and to which Enid's comment reinforces:

[EN: 'because of the environment they have to know how to read they have to know how to write they should have good handwriting, they have to know how they arrange their work before they go to class one'][EN04: 148-01]

5.3.3.2 Copying and task-completion for successful school transition

All the teachers perceived the *role of the preschool* as an academic environment and therefore saw a need to use *a subject-based approach* to prepare children for *primary school transition*. In addition, both Lenora's and Enid's comment suggests a belief in repetitive writing as a memory strategy. Their comments illustrate their beliefs:

[BE: You know when a child begins to write, the first stage is scribbling, so you just give them a slate that you can rub-he scribbles and you rub...] [BE01: 146-148; 492- 494]

[LE: [I] Give them that chance they go to the blackboard ...to write...that when we come to the real work that they are writing in their exercise books, that child will have known...] [LE0B:34; 36; 38; 40]

[EN: It is always good to remind them...every day...every single day... if you miss some few days, they will forget about it] [EN01:112-116]

[ST: we have to give limit [use of material] so that we can have time to do class work [write] [ST01:167; 171]

In addition, Enid's comment illustrates the belief that children's educational experiences should reflect readiness to transition to the primary school:

[EN: Because according to the way I know the situation there is that those children who are supposed to go to class one they have to read and have to know how to write from the blackboard... [By the time, they are in senior class [5year-olds] they are supposed to know how to read and write, do subtraction, addition, all those things...][EN04:167; 169; 171-01]

Children use their writing and reading abilities to communicate (Trawick-Smith, 2003:397). As an important literacy step, it can provide a record to assess children's progress in learning (Crowther & Welhousen, 2004:132; MacNaughton & Williams, 2004:256). In addition, children link their learning to meaningful writing experiences (Neuman & Roskos, 2005:25). According to Kostelnik *et al.* (2004:333), children should

enjoy their writing experiences in a DAP writing framework which reflects voluntary urge to write, but in a quiet environment as suggested by Crowther and Wellhousen (2004:132). In addition to this, Smidt (2007:93) reminds that writing is a complex process that requires understanding of composition (what to write) and making the relevant marks (transcription).

However, the compulsory copying and completion of tasks, which the teacher marked, does not reflect a DAP framework. Consequently, this assessment-based writing undermines children's security, sense of self-worth and belonging, depending on how successful they are as they complete the tasks (Kostelnik *et al.* 2004:48). Besides, the already written work for copying denies the children an opportunity to compose and transcribe (Smidt, 2007:93).

Scholars such as Crowther and Wellhousen (2004:136) have argued that some teachers could use writing for class control, especially when they have up to 30 children in their classes. Wang *et al.* (2008:243) concluded from their Chinese sample that class size could also influence preschool teachers' beliefs about early childhood curriculum. However, in the current study, since all classes had between 15 and 30 children, the motive for using writing as a control measure does not apply to the current context. Instead, feedback to parents appeared to motivate copying and written-task activities, as the following discussion illustrates.

5.3.3.3 Copying and written activities act as feedback to parents

The need to provide parents with feedback about their children's schoolwork seemed to motivate copying and written task completion. This belief seemed to reinforce an implicit belief that they operate in a competitive school environment in which parents compare schools to gauge the quality of *learning*, as illustrated by Belinda's and Lenora's comments.

[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] [In some schools they introduce some things; 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] [BE01:131-134; 212; 214].

[LE: we give writing material]...for the children to do their work so that they will be taking them home, or we put in their files; if the parent comes to see the child's progress, we give them to see] [LE01B: 670-674;-680; & LE02:623].

Belinda, Lenora's and Enid's comments highlight issues of accountability, focusing on written tasks and preparation for assessment (Foote *et al.*, 2004:144; Katz, 2003; 1995:130; 1993; Kostelnik *et al.*, 2006:186; Seefeldt & Wasik, 2006:148). Moreover, these teachers *equated learning* to formal tasks that involve written tasks, as Lenora's remarks illustrate how she avoids [*too much learning*]- LE01B:384] [in baby and middle class], with less written tasks. Lenora's comment, which is representative of the observed children's educational experiences, expresses a belief that formal learning tasks that include knowledge of numbers and their values, and letters and their sounds, should be part of '*real learning*' at the Top class (see LE01B:784, 794, 800). Furthermore, her belief that *learning* begins in Top class where children get to learn formal academic tasks suggests a belief in the formal approach to their written tasks observed in the study:

[LE: In middle class they continue until they know how to write letters A up to Z...known numbers very well letters with their sounds... be able to (pause) join the letters now, the letter sound... senior class now...that is now the year that we call the year of learning now. Because that is the final year of the child [at preschool] [LE01B: 386-392; 752; 690-774]

Apart from beliefs related to school transition to the primary school, the teachers also believe that parents require children to write as part of their preschool educational experiences. They articulated this belief in the following comments:

[LE: we give writing material... do their work so they will be taking them home, or we put in their files; if the parent comes to see the child's progress, we give them to see] [LE01B:664-680; & LE02:623]

[BE: Children they go to [to school] read and write] [BE01:131-134]

Belinda believes that *parents expect* that when children go to school they should engage in written tasks, as Stella concludes that when parents visit the school, the teacher should have feedback on children's written work. Therefore, teachers believe that a preschool developmentally appropriate teaching strategy ought to include written tasks that parents can access. Consequently, this concern to provide feedback to parents reinforced copying and task-completion.

Although one of the DAP principles emphasizes the need to involve parents in their children's learning (Kostelnik *et al.*, 2005:18; Gordon & Browne, 2000:43-44; Seefeldt & Wasik, 2006:17), the children's educational experiences should still embrace DAP principles rooted in neurological research (Gallagher, 2005:14). Goldstein (2007b:380) warns that the increasing demand for accountability and mastery of academic skills has made kindergarten teaching more complex. Robinson and Díaz (2006:59) agree that several global changes, such as privatization of preschools, and downgrading of the public school system in many parts of the world, impacts negatively on the practice of early childhood education.

Repetitive copying and task-completion embraced a highly structured, teacher-directed approach to children's educational experiences. Regardless, most children were effective in completing their written tasks, albeit with a little pushing. However since these tasks took much of the children's time, their motivation to learn was reduced because of the highly structured environment in which these tasks took place (Elkind in Zeng & Zeng, 2005:708; Goldstein, 2007b:390; Neuman & Roskos, 2005:23). Moreover, formal instruction violates the natural tendency through which children learn during play (Smidt, 2007:64; Sroufe *et al.*, 1996:387-9; Zeng & Zeng, 2005:707). Children sitting "station style, learning to follow, comply and obey hours on end" subjects them to an early disinterest to learning (Neuman & Roskos, 2005:26).

Literature notwithstanding, there is need to be cautious when interpreting the observed copying and task-completion activities, and the emerging beliefs in the study context. Trawick-Smith (2003:280) warns that reading and writing mean different things in different cultures and that the DAP interpretation varies with the context (Jambunathan & Caulfield, 2006:255). Therefore, copying and task-completion as educational experiences have two implications for my research context. First, the open-design of most Kenyan traditional classrooms, including preschools (such as in the study context), does not support the quiet environment for writing. Secondly, the 'social', rather than the 'privacy' psyche among community members does not favour such 'quiet' environments. After all, the famous 'social psyche' quote by Philip Mbiti, a renowned African religion scholar, and a Kenyan himself, reiterated the social position of man in the African society, that "I am because we are, and since we are, therefore, I am" (Mbiti, 1969:108-9). The collectivist 'social' view of children in the study context contrasts with the

Westernised view that emphasize individualism and self-hood (Klein & Chen, 2001:12; Penn in Robinson & Díaz, 2006:56). Apart from the ‘social’ nature of the classrooms, the teachers’ beliefs about transition to primary school reinforced their approach to structured writing.

As observed, school transition requirements influence teachers’ beliefs that children must learn to copy work from the blackboard, *the primary school way*, as part of a successful transition programme. Therefore, Enid and Lenora, as teachers at the Top classes³² provided children with opportunities to copy tasks from the chalkboard, using a subject-based approach such as English tasks, Maths tasks and Kiswahili tasks. This finding is consistent with other research that teachers use a skills-based approach to children’s learning (Jingbo & Elicker, 2005:140). More to this, Biersteker *et al.* (2008:228) write that in most parts of Africa, pre-primary programs use a primary school instructions approach favoured by parents as a pre-requisite to success in later schooling. Adding to this social expectation paradigm, Jingbo and Elicker (2005:140) observed that their study reflected the Chinese kindergarten as a system with an educational plan and goals that mainly focuses on transmitting knowledge and skills. Foote *et al.* (2004:144) note that government regulation in addition to demands from parents may be key factors that determine the nature of children’s literacy opportunities.

5.3.4 TEACHING STRATEGY: A GENERAL DISCUSSION

Despite various sources of pressure, Goldstein (2007b:388) notes that teachers can use one of three approaches to balance the demands for standards as they remain developmentally appropriate. First, *integration* (craft knowledge and skills into play-based activities), second, *demarcation* (allocate specific time of the daily schedule for plays and some for worksheets), and third, *acquiescence* involves giving in to parent’s demands to teach academic skills, but with specific limits to these demands. Other scholars agree that it is possible for teachers to focus on skills-based teaching, as they remain developmentally appropriate (Masseti & Bracken, 2008:11; Goldstein, 2007b:380; Helm & Katz in Geist & Baum, 2005:32; Stipek, 2007).

³² These were the five-year-old children preparing to transition to the primary school. Therefore, since primary school learning involves structured writing, the preschool teachers’ use of these approaches might reflect a developmentally appropriate approach, if perceived in the context.

Goldstein (2007b) offers a typology of blending both skills and child-centred approaches; acquiescing and accommodating by setting limits as to how much academics to teach, while still remaining DAP in their approach. With the exception of Belinda, who engaged in *demarcation*, the other three teachers engaged in what is *complete acquiescence* as they engaged children in *academic skills only*. The variety of teaching approaches appropriate for preschool did not emerge.

From an holistic perspective, the teaching strategies used by Lenora, Enid, and Stella did not embrace any of the '*balancing strategies*' advanced by Goldstein (2007b). These lacked the child-centred approach, which embraces first-hand experiences, recommended in the early childhood literature (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997; Katz, 1995:108-109; Kostelnik *et al.*, 2004:18; Stipek, 2007:742). In many instances, these teachers embraced *complete* acquiescence by focusing on teacher-directed basal worksheets. Although skills teaching benefits children to acquire basic skills, it denies them the ability to direct their own learning, and to transfer knowledge to other situations (Stipek, 2004:563; Stipek, 1993:48; Zeng & Zeng, 2005:712).

A child-centred approach, or one of the '*balancing*' strategies suggested by Goldstein (2007b), provides a middle ground. However, since the concept of child-centred has varied meanings (Chung & Walsh, 2000:229), there is a need to interpret these teachers' beliefs about their strategies cautiously, within the immediate social context. Viewed from the cultural context of the study (Jambunathan & Caulfield, 2006:257), the teachers' beliefs and approach to children's educational experiences are appropriate, because they prepare children to fit to the primary school as well as creating positive relationships with parents (Goldstein, 2007b:396), and since preschools in Kenya are downward extensions of the primary school (Prochner & Kabiru, 2008:128). Moreover, since children got an opportunity to learn by doing, through limited choices of their reading activities, they might also qualify as a DAP to reading, as expressed in the teachers' beliefs.

However, the fact that the teachers, except Belinda, did not vary the teaching strategy, mainly focusing on a subject-based approach, might suggest a developmentally inappropriate curriculum (Kostelnik, 2004:18; Neuman & Roskos, 2005:26). Therefore, the literacy content selection fits a DAP framework, especially on language (Kostelnik *et al.*, 2004:333; Saracho & Spodek, 2003:180), but the teaching method which is highly

structured to focus on isolated subjects, devoid of manipulative materials, shifts it towards DIP (Jambunathan & Caulfield, 2006:256; Katz, 1995:108-9). Regardless, Goldstein (2007b:374) warns that acquiescence must be viewed in the context in which it occurs, and that if it fulfils the larger goal of maintaining partnerships with parents, it is ‘justifiable’ but must be interspersed with strategies that first meet the developmental needs of the children.

In the current context, the teachers were concerned to meet parents’ expectations for learning, but since they completely acquiesced, they might have ignored children’s other developmental needs. Unlike in previous studies, where teachers’ beliefs reflected an emphasis on social and emotional development (Cassidy & Lawrence, 2002:202; Cuskelly & Detering, 2003:41; Lin *et al.*, 2003:233; Pretti-Frontczak *et al.*, 2001:10; Timperley, 2003:335), teachers’ beliefs in the current study revealed a focus on *selected aspects* of cognitive development. Li (2003) and Jambunathan and Caulfield (2006:256) report similar observations, in which teachers focused on cognitive, isolated content in children’s learning. Therefore, for children to learn isolated content on a subject-based approach, do not reflect the universal definitions of a DAP approach to their learning (Kostelnik *et al.*, 2004:149; McMullen *et al.*, 2006:87). Citing other authors, Charlesworth (2008:340) warn that children exposed to testing, whole group activities focusing on teaching academic skills out of context as they sit for long periods are likely to exhibit stress behaviours.

Stipek (2007) and Miles and Stipek (2006) warn that social skills are necessary for academic success and ignoring the former might be perilous to the child’s development. Bronfenbrenner (1972:671) warned that apart from emphasizing subject matter, character formation is equally important, as it develops “the child’s qualities as a person - his values, motives and patterns of social response”, and gives partial responsibility to the home and the school to develop. Miles and Stipek (2006) demonstrated that children’s positive social skills translate to positive academic achievement in kindergarteners and first graders. Rosenholtz and Simpson (in Katz, 1995:114) conclude, “A pedagogical approach is appropriate if it adopts a variety of methods to teaching that avails a wide variety and range of activities to children”. Stipek (2007) adds her voice to the need for teachers to embed academic skills in playful and meaningful experiences for preschoolers.

Apart from interpreting the practices and beliefs from the dominant Western view of the typical preschool, which do not support child-led activities and the society's expectations of the preschool, the prevailing practices are developmentally appropriate in the study context. This is because "the meanings attached to preschool *as a space between* are sometimes contested and various discourses conflict" as Prochner *et al.* (2008:200) conclude. Therefore, the wider social expectations of the preschool have influenced teachers' practices, as reflected in children's educational experiences, which is appropriate when considered within the social expectations for preschool. Levy (in Prochner *et al.*, 2008:199-200) observes that the "space between home and school discourses" reflects the dominant expectations of a society, which varies by context.

The predominant approach to children's educational activities, such as choral reading, copying and written activities meant that teachers seldom used learning materials. In the next section, I address teachers' beliefs about the use of materials at three levels; the conceptual view held by all the teachers, the silence of materials in three classes, and the exception observed in Belinda's class.

5.4 THEME 2: THE 'SILENCING'/ USE OF LEARNING MATERIALS

The advocacy of [a] play- oriented curriculum has become "politically correct". Yet many teachers do not really understand or accept developmentally appropriate approach with its emphasis on play. 'The problem ...is that teachers often interpret the idea of play- oriented curriculum in different ways, and express these interpretations in a wide variety of often contradictory classroom practice....resulting in agreement at the rhetoric, but disagreement at the practical level of children's experiences in classrooms (DeVries, 2002:13).

This section discusses the teachers' beliefs about the use of learning materials in their respective classrooms. I take three different approaches in this section; first, I examine the conceptual beliefs of all teachers about the general importance of the use of materials. Whereas the discussion provides practical experiences among all the teachers regarding their use/silencing³³ of materials, the emerging beliefs do not reflect their practical experiences, except in Belinda's class. Second, I scrutinize teachers' practical

³³ As footnoted earlier, the metaphor of the teachers 'silencing' materials derives from the active process where they might have deliberately chosen not to use the materials, even though these were available in their classes

experiences about the *silence* of the learning materials, and the reasons for the prevalence of this practice in three of the four classes observed. Third, I explore how Belinda engaged children with free play. Figure 28 (below) summarizes the themes under discussion in this section. The figure illustrates the three levels of the discussion. Level A represents the conceptual view about materials (even if they did not use them). Level B represents the actual observation that Lenora, Stella and Enid did not use materials. Level C represents Belinda’s actual use of materials and her emerging beliefs. The arrow linking level A and C indicates that Belinda expressed both a conceptual view and a practical approach to use of the learning materials.

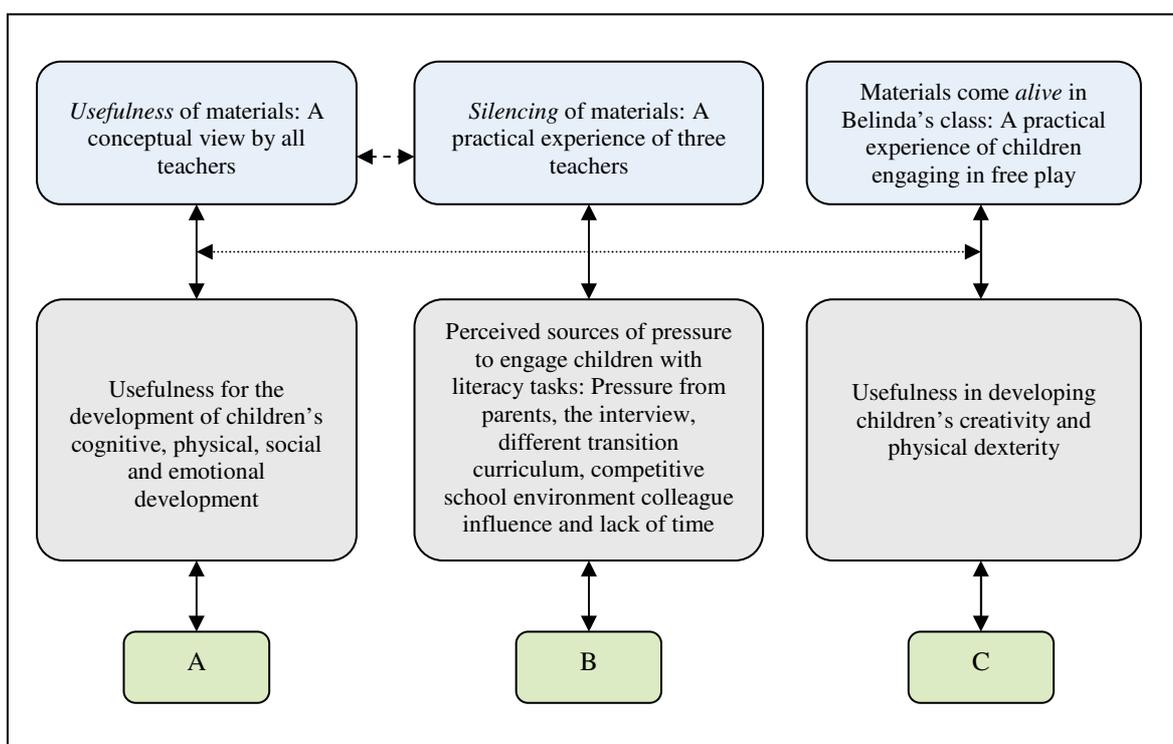


FIGURE 28: Levels of analysis and presentation of use of materials

5.4.1 USEFULNESS OF MATERIALS: A CONCEPTUAL VIEW

First, we as educators must recognize the unique ways in which children are children, not miniature adults (Kostelnik *et al.*, 2004:17).

This section presents a discussion on each teacher’s conceptual view of the use of learning materials, even though this was not evident in their observed practical experiences. There were some handmade wooden Montessori materials in both Montessori classes, including Belinda’s class, and locally available waste-tub materials,

including margarine, washing powder and spice tubs, and other empty packaging packs in both DICECE classes, as materials for potential engagement.

From their discussions, all the teachers endorsed the use of materials, although Lenora, Enid and Stella silenced these in *children's educational experiences*. Belinda was the exception. Conceptually, the teachers' beliefs linked the use of materials to children's *creativity, physical development* and their *emotional* development. The teachers' emerging beliefs reflected a DAP approach to the use of materials in children's learning to enhance their holistic development and approach to learning (Crowther & Wellhousen, 2004:187; Gallagher, 2005:18; Kostelnik *et al.*, 2004:49; Seefeldt & Wasik, 2006:89; Smidt, 2006:54).

5.4.1.1 Learning materials bridge cognitive development

All teachers valued the use of learning materials to enhance children's *cognitive* development as their comments underscore:

[BE: *So they have the chance to develop their talent*][BE01:448; 450; 452]

[ST: *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. I should have those "ninis" sand paper, whereby the child will feel, if it was number one (1) the child will feel number one just that*][ST03:300; 306; 310-01][...because all these materials are like a textbook] [ST03:322; 360; 362-01]

[EN...and then we take do introductions from a-z. Then we take, we show them, a, and we show them where a, is supposed to be and then b, is supposed to be, and then c, to Z...and then after we have introduced letters in the movable boards that is when we shall start introducing writing the letters on it.][EN01:48; 50]

[LE: *[free play] so, it helps them a lot. It helps the children to increase their vocabulary also, yea and the socialization*][LE01:22-02]

For example, Stella linked the use of materials to children's 'muscular memory' of numbers (Montessori, 1920:277), equating materials to a textbook. De Vries *et al.* (2002:41) note that as children engage with learning tasks, they get opportunities to reason as they do problem solving in tangible experiences that engage them in trial and error. These processes not only enhance personal effort in problem solving, but they also provide children with opportunities to develop confidence in their thinking skills.

5.4.1.2 Learning materials enhance physical development

Belinda and Enid articulated the benefits of using materials to enhance children's *physical development*. Lenora linked children's free-play to their *social and emotional development*, through shared experiences as they enjoyed their learning experiences through free interaction with each other and with materials. Their comments illustrate their belief:

[BE: it co-ordinates (pause)...the hands and an indirect preparation for writing ...it makes the muscles stronger...][BE01:457-465]

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

[LE: The child should play even the child to be dirty the child goes home is dirty... that child has really felt so good even the mind will feel fresh ...that the child will grow and when learning comes, the child will able to learn][LE02:815- 819]

In line with the holistic approach to child development, early childhood education ought to provide opportunities that integrate children's cognitive, physical, social, and emotional development. Lenora's comments corroborate the conclusion about the latter two aspects of development:

[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 [Mtaa] village, when I go to place Safari village I do this and that][LE01:34-02]

[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]

It has been suggested by Sutterby and Thornton (in Charlesworth, 2008:353) that large scale physical-motor movements such as hopping, jumping, running and climbing affect the growth of the sensorimotor cortex in the brain. Therefore activities that require children to move their whole bodies (development of gross-motor skill) and those that require them to move smaller muscles (development of fine-motor skill) are valuable for children's physical development. Apart from gaining control over their body movements, as children develop physically, they can also control their ability to play effectively through throwing, jumping hopping and skipping. These various levels of body

control become requisite to children's development fine-motor muscles for writing (Charlesworth, 2008:353, 355).

It appears from their comments that all the teachers in this study believed that the use of learning materials was important for different dimensions of *children's development*; physical, social, emotional and cognitive domains. However, each teacher linked it to the *children's readiness* to engage in *educational* tasks. Therefore, these teachers also linked children's physical dexterity to the development of their writing skill that they emphasized through copying tasks rather than engaging children with materials. From Stella's, Lenora's and Enid's comments, it is evident they use materials only for *introductory purposes* at the beginning of the preschool year, until children are able to write, despite displaying a variety of such learning materials in their classes, and demonstrating their knowledge about their uses.

Young children require sensorial stimulation for their overall development (Blakemore & Frith, 2005:461; Bredekamp & Copple, 1997:125; Broadhead, 2001:34; Crowther & Wellhousen, 2004:185; Montessori, 1820:23; Wasik & Seefeldt, 2006:16-7). Since children learn by connecting their concrete experiences to their thinking to test out theories (Foot, Smith & Ellis, 2004:144), as they "take in data through all their senses" (Kostelnik *et al.*, 2004:46), the use of learning materials in the early childhood environment is critical to their learning (Beaty, 1996:5).

Although all the teachers in the study valued materials, they did not engage children with them. Hyson (in McMullen *et al.*, 2006:82) suggests that colleagues and administrators might influence teachers to endorse methods that they do not believe in. The fact that teachers in this study endorsed the use of materials despite '*silencing*' them is consistent with a conclusion by Cassidy and Lawrence (2000:202) and Miller and Smith (2004:128), that teachers' endorsement of materials does not always translate to its use. Prochner, Cleghorn and Green (2008:190) link the purposes that materials serve to the social, cultural, historical and the policy framework of the preschool. The teachers' '*silencing*' of materials arose from their concern to prepare children for academic tasks, which they perceived to be in conflict with the use of materials. In the next section, I explore some of the emerging beliefs related to the '*silencing of materials*'.

5.4.2 THE ‘SILENCING’ OF LEARNING MATERIALS: A PRACTICAL OBSERVATION

It is imperative that the learning experiences offered to the very young, respect their natural, playful style of learning, rather than impose a rigid and tedious approaches to mastering academic skills (Jalongo *et al.*, 2004:145).

The section juxtaposes the availability of materials with their use in the classes of Lenora, Stella and Enid. All the observed classes had a varying degree and availability of teaching materials. The Montessori preschool classes had most of the recommended Montessori materials which included geometric insets of woods, wooden tablets, solid wood insets, sand paper letters, number rods and colour tablets (Montessori, 1920), all displayed in open-shelves within the children’s reach (Prochner *et al.*, 2008:196). The DICECE classrooms had locally available empty tubs materials, such as those of detergent, margarine and fresh produce packages (strawberry tubs, spice tins and others), that were stored in a lockable cupboard. This range of local materials reflects the conclusion by Prochner *et al.* (2008:199) that some materials at the preschool have meaning within the local culture. Although the empty tubs may not be typically ‘indigenous’, they nevertheless form part of the social life of the children who interact with the commercial empty tubs in their social and cultural experiences.

As already footnoted, the metaphorical term ‘*silencing of materials*’ emphasizes the availability of the learning materials and opportunities to use them, but it did not translate into observed children’s interaction with them. Addendum 14 is a summary of the lessons observed and a general content of these lessons. As the teachers ‘*silenced*’ materials, it emerged that they perceived various sources of pressure to be in conflict with their use of materials. This appears to resonate with the conclusion by Devault in Goldstein (2008:253) and that of Geist and Baum (2005), that kindergarten teachers are increasingly under pressure to remain DAP, one of whose principles is to engage children with learning materials.

These concerns included pressure from parents for written tasks, different transition primary school curriculum and other external sources of pressure that include a competitive school environment and peer influence (to be discussed in the next voyage). Figure 29 and 30 (below) summarize the sub-themes related to silencing of materials as a response to the different perceived sources of pressure. Specifically, figure 28

summarizes the nuances from the interviews with the teachers as to why they did not engage children with materials. The following section elaborates on each of these concerns as illustrated in figure 29 below.

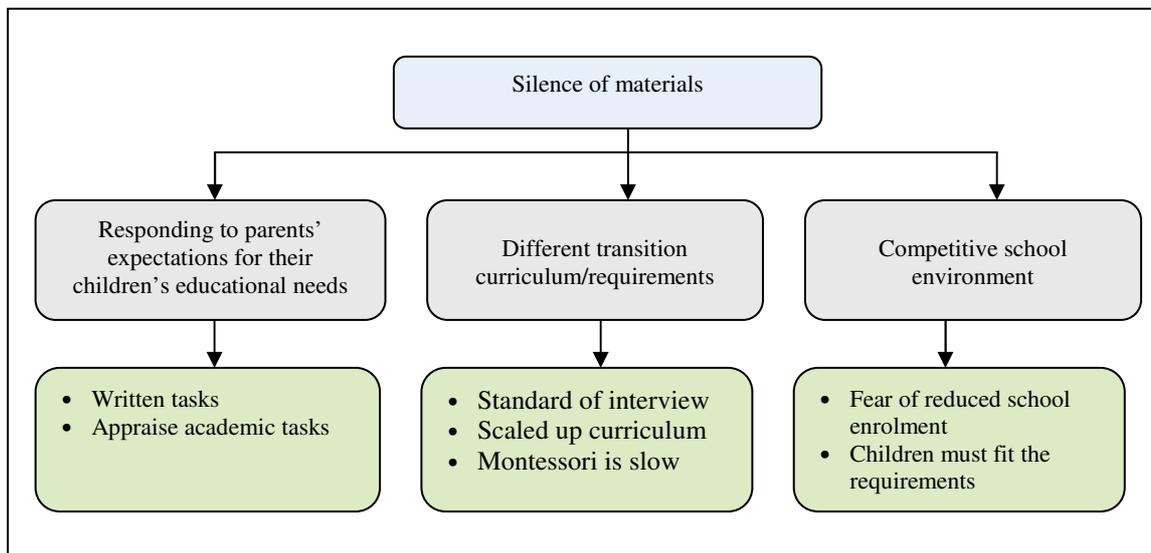


FIGURE 29: A summary of beliefs related to the ‘*silence of materials*’

5.4.2.1 Silencing of materials: Responding to pressure from parents

Parents are increasingly under pressure to ensure that their children succeed and survive the education system...parental anxiety about their children’s academic success begins in the preschool years... (Robinson & Diaz, 2006:51).

Although this study does not address the issue of quality perspectives in early childhood education (Katz, 1995), the conflict between what parents and other stakeholders expect, and the ideals of a DAP approach to children’s manipulation of materials is apparent from the current study. From the teachers’ comments summarized in figure 30 (below), it might appear that the teachers believe there exists a conflict between the focus on academics, which requires children to engage in elaborate writing, and the use of materials, requiring playful learning. The following sentiments summarize their beliefs about pressure from parents:

[BE: They also have to know how to write, because parents expect that when their children come to school...][BE01:131; 133; 134]

LE: So, sometimes we have challenges, sometimes the parent does not understand...[when a child fails the interview][LE01:134-02]

[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]

[ST: if I go on sitting with all types of materials of Montessori, a parent will come, and wants to know, is my child writing, can I see her books or his books?...][ST01:167; 171]

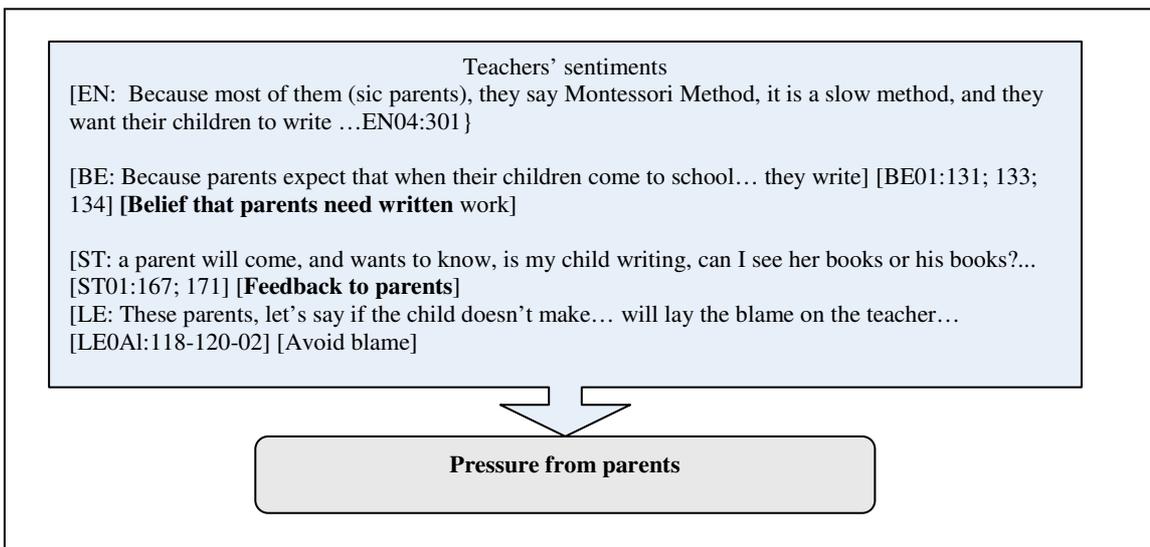


FIGURE 30: Beliefs related to the Silence of materials: - Pressure from parents

The concern that parents expect their children to write at preschool limits teachers from exposing children to manipulative materials. This reflects an observation by McMullen *et al.* (2005:454), citing a similar experience in Korea as an example. Jambunathan and Caulfield (2006:256), citing a case from India, and Zeng and Zeng (2005:716) in a US example, illustrate similar experiences of how pressure from parents restricts teachers from using play, thereby reflecting similar experiences and beliefs of the teachers in the study context. In contrast, Lee and Ginsberg (2007:19) note that the *hot-housing* phenomenon, where parents put too much academic pressure on their children at home, elicited sympathy among the teachers in their study who did not see it necessary to reinforce what parents do at home. Instead, they felt that children needed to use opportunities for social enrichment, rather than spend time in academic skills acquisition.

The beliefs expressed by these teachers seem to indicate a conflict between their own expectations and that of parents and other stakeholders. This is consistent with conclusions that a difference in expectations for Kindergarten teachers from various stakeholders create tension and conflict on what dimensions of learning they need to

emphasize (Wien, in Goldstein, 2007b:380). Sometimes it is the teachers who feel the push to implement external *standards* (Hatch, in Goldstein, 2007b:380; Maccoby & Lewis, 2003:1074; Morrison, 2006:223; 251; Miller, 2005:257; Moyles, 2001:81; Neumann, 2005:191; Palmer, 2005:26; Warner & Sower, 2005:242).

In addition to responding to pressure from the parents, teachers linked the silence of materials to a perceived discontinuity between the preschool curriculum and the transition requirements. In the next section, I discuss how teachers' beliefs about these differences have silenced their use of materials.

5.4.2.2 The silencing of materials: Different transition requirements

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 (Jalongo *et al.*, 2004:144).

The teachers' concerns about primary school transition requirements underscored the silence of materials, particularly among the Montessori teachers. Three sub-themes emerged from the teachers' beliefs that reinforce the silencing of the materials, namely lack of continuity between preschool and primary school curriculum; lack of time to blend materials and academic tasks; and a perceived inadequate preschool curriculum. Figure 31 (below) illustrates some nuances related to school transition.

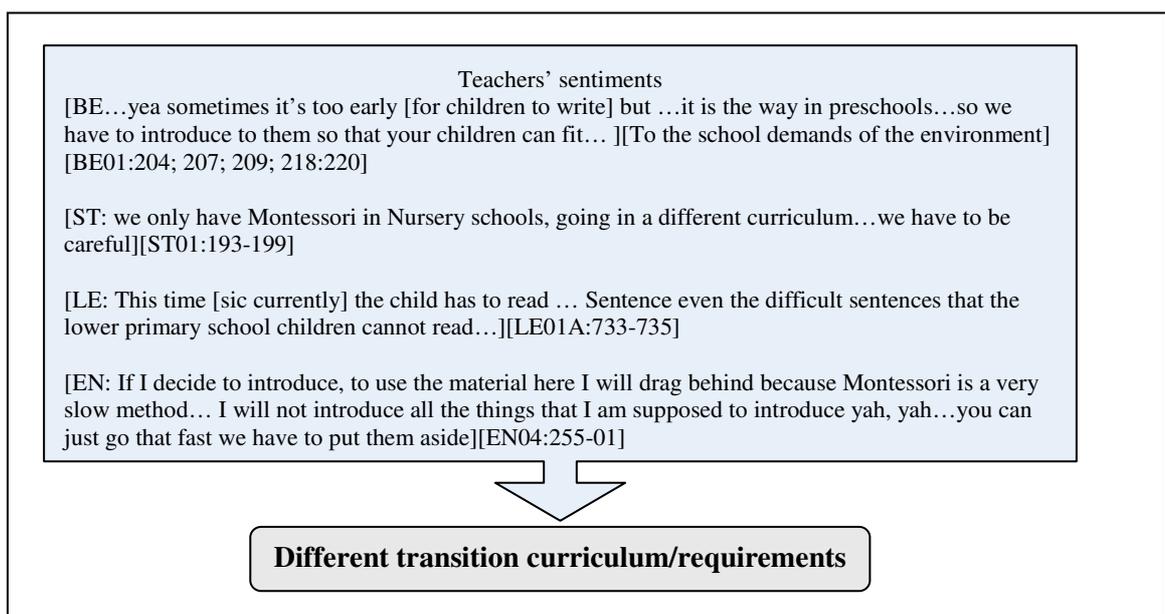


FIGURE 31: Beliefs related to the *Silence* of materials:- Different transition curriculum/requirements

Enid and Stella, who are the Montessori teachers, believe that there was a lack of continuity between the Montessori curriculum and mainstream primary schools. They emphasized that children who attend Montessori preschools would be disadvantaged if they engaged with the elaborate materials recommended for the Montessori system, without much task-based written activities. Stella's comments stress this view:

[ST: but you see here in or environments, we only have Montessori in Nursery schools, going in a different curriculum...we have to be careful [what we teach]. 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][ST01:193-199]

From Stella's comments, it is evident that the teachers believe a DAP approach to the use of materials should incorporate academic skills in the preschool curriculum, so that children who attend Montessori preschools successfully make a transition to the primary school. From observations, it seems that emphasis on psycho-fine-motor development through copying, colouring, and differentiated task completion, which replaced children's use of manipulatives, results from pressure to prepare them early for transition to primary school. The compromise on the use of materials resulted from perceived time constraints, as Stella's, Enid's and Lenora's sentiments express:

[EN...so you discover that most of the materials we use in Montessori because they are slow you go on a slow pace you can just go that fast we have to put them aside.][EN02:424; 456; 458; EN04:225]

[ST: Whereby here, we just introduce the, we just introduce the sounds, quickly into two letters double sounds quickly to three letter words, quickly to sentences, without a lot of practice...we have been doing that rushing but they have been coping][ST03:405;411-2]

[LE: Standard one is not far, don't play...Yah so the teachers we yaani (that is) we take it more seriously in senior class, Yah we do not give them time to play a lot][LE01B:214; 216; 218]

From the teachers' comments, *materials do not co-exist with academic work* due to time constraints. Therefore, a DAP approach to the use of materials requires more time than they currently have, and they have *forgone* the use of materials to focus on developing *academic skills* as was observed in their classes. Stella and Enid comment on this compromise:

[ST: If I go on sitting with all types of materials of Montessori...so, we cannot concentrate only on those activities...we have to give limit so that we can have time to do class work][ST01:167; 171]

[EN: if I take, if I start with feeling and writing, feeling and writing you will find that may be I will teach three letters the whole term.][EN04:251-01]

Although the DICECE teachers did not emphasize lack of time as a constraint to their use of materials, or *difference* in transition curriculum, Lenora, who is a DICECE teacher, believes that the recommended preschool content is *too elementary* for the current demand to prepare children for primary school transition. Besides, she notes that they have so much to cover before the standard one interview. In her view:

[LE... [We are] not supposed to give children too much or this kind of work. but because of interviews that they are doing there are forced to give them, so we try also to go beyond...what is it supposed to be][LE02:100;112-114]

Therefore, due to perceived *differences* between *preschool curriculum* content, *transition requirements*, and *time constraints*, teachers believe that it is *sufficient* for the children to manipulate learning materials only in their first and second years of preschool. In the third year, the teachers believe that they should focus on academic tasks. Enid and Lenora elaborate on their beliefs:

[EN: those materials we normally use them in Baby and that is why you find that baby class and middle class are using most of the materials because you have not yet introduce reading or writing all time...they know colours they know the shapes, they know sounds...I am not using them because they already know it][EN04:229]

[LE: You realise in senior class the child has known eeh the value of coming to school. Because I find sometimes some of the children now because I have a girl [chepkorir]; that girl when she comes to school, she behaves maturely. In fact she tells others; we come to school to learn and the interview is near so we have to learn][LE01B:190-204]*

Because teachers might only use materials to *introduce concepts*, such as letters, numbers, colours and words, they believed that materials are only necessary to expose children to basic literacy concepts. Their comments corroborate this interpretation:

[EN: I am not using them because they already know it][EN04:229]

[LE: Because in Baby and middle we use those eeh, let's say pieces of cloth colored or colored pieces of wood ...but now in senior class because they have already known all those things...][LE02:631-633]. Yah ...we are preparing them seriously; we do not take them to those areas; because they have gone through those areas][LE01B:17-176]

Enid and Lenora both taught in the last year of preschool³⁴, hence justifying their focus on preparing children for primary school transition. However, although Stella and Belinda taught four-year-olds, hence still in their perceived *materials use phase*, only Belinda engaged children with manipulatives. This suggests that the teachers still *focus* on the demands for the perceived transition requirements, even *before the last year* of preschool. Consequently, the motive to compromise on the use of materials during the first and second year of preschool, particularly in Stella's class, resides elsewhere than primary school transition requirements.

Generally, from the comments from Stella, Enid and Lenora it is evident that the need for children *to be ready academically* might have *silenced* their use of materials. Although the use of materials develops children's fine motor skills, the teachers' preponderance to structured written tasks arises from the social value attached to children's worksheets (McMullen *et al.*, 2005:454; Miller & Smith, 2004:131). Low adult child ratio (Foote *et al.*, 2005:142; McMullen *et al.*, 2005:454) and parental pressure (Jambunathan & Caulfield, 2006:256; McMullen *et al.*, 2005:454; Zeng & Zeng, 2005:716) also affect use of worksheets. By using copying, task-completion and choral reading, the teachers might also focus on those skills that provide a record of the child's progress for the parents to appraise their children's learning apart from preparing them to ease into primary school.

Skills-based pressure appears to be a problematic transition concern (Timperley *et al.*, 2003:32; Jalongo *et al.*, 2004:145; Jambunathan & Caulfield, 2006:256), which emphasizes different values. Teachers' concerns reflect variable perceptions about transition requirements (Timperley *et al.*, 2003:32; Jalongo *et al.*, 2004:145; Jambunathan & Caulfield, 2006:256) or the expectation to meet mandated standards (Goldstein, 2007b:378; Wang *et al.*, 2008:244). This observation is consistent with the conclusion by Biersteker *et al.*, (2008:243) that preschools in Kenya and South Africa face pressure for skills-based learning.

Lightfoot and Valsiner (in Cuskelly & Detering, 2003:45) found that teachers' knowledge of transition originated from naïve theories located in their experiences rather than from professional knowledge based on teacher training. Therefore, teachers draw from their experiences about what Kenyan society values for her children. Prochner and

³⁴ At the end of the last year of preschool, children do an interview which focuses on academic content, which they must pass to be admitted to standard one.

Kabiru (2008:128) observe in preschool in Kenya that, “to satisfy parents, preschool teachers often put pressure on children to learn skills beyond their ability”. However, Goldstein (2007b:390) refers to this approach to focus on basal skills acquisition as “*boring kindergarten seatwork*”. Stipek (2007:741) warns that academic expectations for kindergarten might “come in the form of whole group instruction, rigid pacing, and repetitive, de-contextualized tasks - a kind of *drill and kill*”

The inconsistency between teachers’ beliefs and their actual use of DAP that incorporates materials in their teaching, reflects the conclusions by other scholars that teachers beliefs do not always reflect their practices (Cassidy & Lawrence, 2000:204; Foote *et al.*, 2004:145; Wilcox-Herzog & Ward, 2002). In addition, teachers tend to focus on skills-based learning (Jambunathan & Caulfield, 2006:255-6). This contrasts with the observations by Goldstein (2007b:396) that teachers in her study blended both standards and child development needs through multiple approaches to teaching, suggesting that it is possible to blend both the standards or the socio-political demands with DAP as concluded by Goldstein (2007b:396; 2008:259).

5.4.2.3 Silencing of materials: A competitive school environment

The following section is a discussion of the teacher nuances that suggest that they did not use materials because of a competitive school environment. Figure 32(below) summarizes some of the nuances about a competitive school environment.

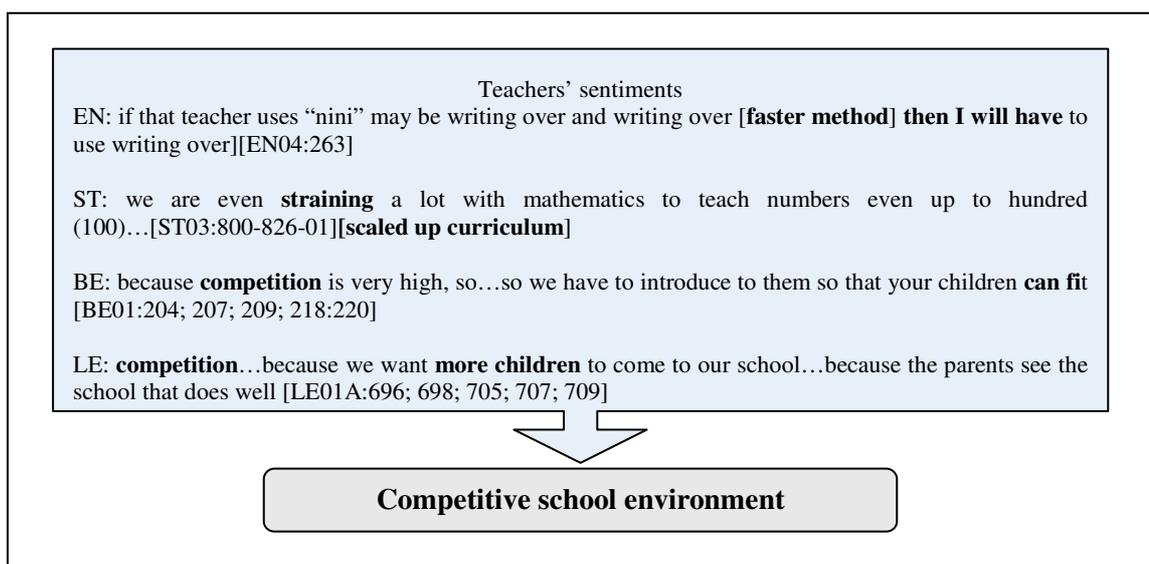


FIGURE 32: Beliefs related to the *Silence* of materials: - competitive school environment

Stella compares the demands of the current preschool to her previous preschool, while Enid was facing a conflict between theory and practice as teachers in her school were using methods that did not reflect the Montessori approach. Belinda and Lenora were concerned to equip their children with the primary school transition requirements, even as Lenora emphasized her concern to increase enrolment in her school by posting good transition interview results.

[ST: we are teaching children a lot of things even apart from that of Montessori [in the current preschool] we are even straining a lot with mathematics to teach numbers even up to hundred (100) ...Take away all sums vertically and horizontally, reading both Kiswahili and English, fluently][ST03:800-812-01; ST03:814-826-01]

Stella, who had a long experience as a Montessori teacher both in her current school and elsewhere, believed that the current environment pressurized them to teach academic skills to children that focus on content beyond their scope. As Stella's comments reflect, school and social forces influence teachers' views of readiness (Graue, in Lin, Lawrence & Gorell, 2003:226; Schoonmaker & Ryan, in Lawrence & Cassidy, 2000:194).

Belinda said that her approach ought to reflect what was going on in their environment, and even when written tasks were too soon for children, she had to engage children in them to reflect on the practices prevailing in the social setting, as this "is the way in preschools". In addition, Belinda expressed fear of children 'not fitting' in the current environment if she did not expose them to early writing. In her comments:

[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... but you find that some of them take time before they can know how to write...][BE01:204; 207; 209; 218:220]

Belinda's belief that schools compete introduces a competitive psyche in her approach to children's learning tasks to prepare children early to excel in examinations. There is a growing concern that preschools in Kenya, especially those in urban centres, are increasingly focusing on an exclusively academic curriculum (Mbugua, 2004:196; Mwaura, 2008:238; Prochner & Kabiru, 2008:126). Hujala (2002:101) notes that programmes that use a subject-based approach at the preschool undermine spontaneity and exploration during learning, and yet teachers should embrace a context-based sensitivity to the way they organize children's daily learning experiences.

Even as schools compete, the focus on cognitive development negates the holistic approach to children's learning and teaching. Partnerships for preschool provision in Kenya (Adams & Swadener, 2000:388; Kenya & UNESCO, 2005:17; Prochner & Kabiru, 2008:127), have reinforced such a cognitive focus because preschools depend on the number of children enrolled for revenue to run the school. Lenora linked the academic focus on children's educational experiences to the school's enrolment:

[LE: Eh the competition, you see if we don't teach these children beyond (pause) what we are being taught in college...because we want more children to come to our school...because the parents see the school that does well or the school that takes more children to standard one. So we try all possible ways to see that the children are taken to standard one so that we get more children][LE01A: 697-709].

Lenora believed that parents enrol their children in preschools that perform well in their standard one interview, which in her view determines the school's enrolment³⁵, apart from absolving the teacher from any blame:

[LE: these parents let us say if the child doesn't make [pass interview], will lay the blame on the teacher, can even go to the extent of even...taking the children for transfer. If they have younger children, they might move the children to another school...just guessing that the teacher is the one with the weakness, because children, children, there are some children who have special needs [LE01:118- 124-02]

Lenora linked the success of the children in the interview to teachers' self-esteem, attributing such success to the teachers' ability. In the following comment she summarised the need to retain her employment and peace-of-mind by preparing the children to pass the interview:

[LE: Yah, because I will be harassed, and I will not have peace, I might even lose my job. Yah][LE02:679]

Although Enid did not refer to a competitive environment, it can be inferred from her comments that she was under pressure to keep pace with colleagues, even if it meant using an inappropriate approach, such as she mentioned using, 'writing over' to develop children's writing skills. Enid felt she was under pressure to match her methods with those of other teachers in the same school, even if she might not agree with them:

³⁵ In one of our informal conversations, Lenora expressed her concern that she might be targeted for retrenchment if the school's enrolment did not increase. Her nuances about perceived pressure might reflect her state of mind.

[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]

‘Writing over’, to which Enid referred, is a faster approach to children’s writing, if varying the teaching approach relates to teachers’ felt time constraints and to the urgency to ‘catch up’ with colleagues. Kostelnik *et al.* (2004:325) underline this divergent and confusing approach to teaching within the same school as an issue, which requires redressing. In their view, teachers who are new in the profession face conflict when there is a disparity between their professional knowledge and their practices on how to teach emerging literacy. Although Enid was not new to the profession (with nine years teaching experience), she was facing a conflict between practice and theory not limited to new teachers only, but also including teachers who have experience and so might face pedagogic conflict.

Preschool pedagogies ought to reflect children’s age (Jalongo *et al.*, 2004:145) because their information processing is different from that of adults (Piaget, in Charlesworth *et al.*, 1993:15). Although the practical dynamics vary by context, Goldstein (2008:254) cautions that teachers in the USA find it difficult to incorporate set-standards to a DAP framework. In another study among six primary one teachers in Scotland, Cassidy (2005:151) reports that teachers felt the pressure to use teacher-directed approaches in ‘a pre-set curriculum’.

5.4.2.4 A general discussion about silence of materials

In summary, as discussed, the children’s educational experiences in all classes except Belinda’s were predominantly subject-based, structured workbook tasks. Apart from engaging with other academic skills-based content, children in Belinda’s class also engaged with materials. In summary, figure 33 (below) illustrates a glimpse of children’s educational experiences (also see addendum 11 for details).

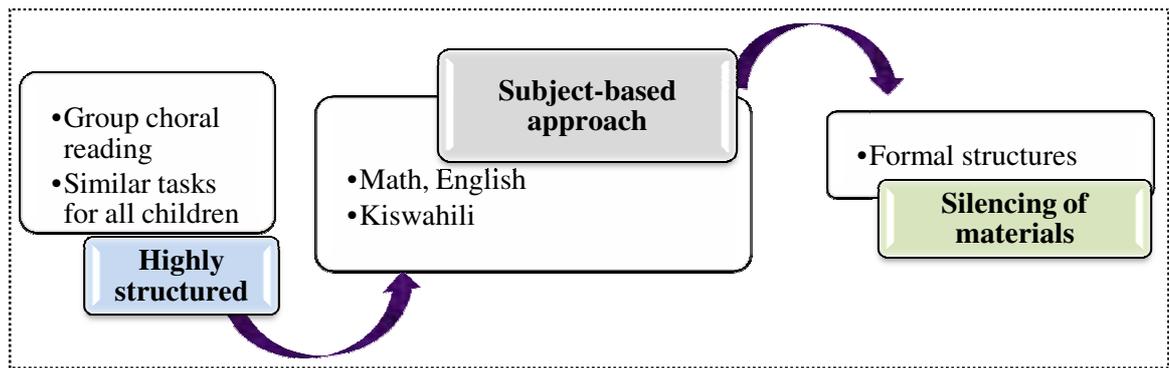


FIGURE 33: A summary of teachers’ teaching strategy

The teachers’ approach to teaching, even in the Montessori preschool with scripted materials, reflected a predominantly *teacher-directed* class. Teachers used a variety of teacher-directed approaches, such as choral reading, through modelling, copying, and task completion. All these approaches focus on children’s *academic learning*, a finding which reflects previous observations related to the emphasis on primary (elementary) school transition (Timperley *et al.*, 2003:32; Jalongo *et al.*, 2004:145; Jambunathan & Caulfield, 2006:256), which emphasizes different content for learning.

The beliefs emerging as regards the silence of materials reflect a response to various sources of pressure, such as the need to prepare children to transition to the primary school, perceived pressure from parents for written tasks, and other sources of pressure, such as colleague influences, and a competitive school environment, among other factors. These factors shaped the emergent teaching strategy and silencing or use of materials in the study context.

Teachers’ beliefs about the requirements for school transition have influenced their beliefs about the appropriate practices (Lightfoot & Valsiner, in Cuskelly & Detering, 2003:45). As discussed above, children engaged with reading activities of the print-rich environment, completing tasks and copying letters of the alphabet, mostly as whole group activities, associated with higher grades than kindergarten (Vartuli, 1999:504). This approach demonstrates a high structure with an academic emphasis (Jambunathan & Caulfield, 2006:256; McMullen *et al.*, 2006:87) or basal reading and writing emphasis (Neuman & Roskos, 2005:23;25) or ‘a standards-based accountability’ system (Goldstein, 2007b:379).

In some instances, such as in literacy experiences, the teachers' beliefs reflect developmentally appropriate teaching practices, which included story-telling and choral reading (Foote *et al.*, 2004:136; Miller & Smith, 2004:122; Stipek, 2004:551; Yoo, 2005:142). Teachers hold a divergent view towards children's literacy, ranging from literacy as a skills-based knowledge of the letters of the alphabet to more integrated approaches (Foote *et al.*, 2004:136). However, such a dichotomy rarely exists in reality. Rather, teachers blend skills-based and expository literacy learning during their teaching (Miller & Smith, 2005:128). The approach by teachers in the study reflects this continuum, but it relies more on a structured teacher-directed approach (Stipek, 2004:551) than on a child-centred approach.

On the other hand, Lee and Ginsberg (2008:20) report that pre-kindergarten teachers feel that changes in the early education field have influenced their beliefs that children should be exposed to early mathematics. The disquiet about school readiness concerns that has made it increasingly difficult for teachers to implement a developmentally appropriate curriculum is noted by several authors (Geist & Baum, 2005:28; Wien, in Goldstein, 2007b:380; 2008:254; Kostelnik *et al.*, 2004:15; Neuman & Roskos, 2005:24; Seefeldt & Wasik, 2006:35).

In Goldstein's (2007b) terminology, Enid, Stella and Lenora embrace complete acquiescence in their beliefs, giving in to parents' demands rather than meeting children's needs for learning. Jambunathan and Caulfield (2006:256) conclude that class size determines the approach used by the teacher to plan children's learning, while Foote *et al.*, (2004:142) observe that class size also affects the duration of interactions between children and their teachers. Teachers with few children tend to use child-centred approaches, while those with large classes prefer question-and-answer approaches. Massetti and Bracken (2008:10) conclude from their study that children engaged in skills-focused classrooms exhibited lower levels of behavioural and social problems than did their counterparts in social development-oriented classrooms.

Because not all teachers had teaching assistants, they tactfully used choral activities to fill up for their temporary withdrawals, as illustrated by vignette one. In my view, choral reading was one behaviour management strategy effectively used by all the teachers to occupy the children as the rest completed a workbook task, while they were off-task as

they marked, or while they prepared children's subsequent tasks. In Stella's³⁶ case, she was in her office. Choral reading thus benefited both the teacher and children. Rarely did any child wonder aimlessly, nor display much negative behaviour, even when the teacher was off-task.

Prochner *et al.* (2008:190-191; 200) observe that the organisation of space presumes "an educational purpose" that the programme serves. However, in my study, the space for the *silent materials*, although available in the three classes, remained ambiguous for most of the time. In addition, they caution that the tendency to interpret the availability and use of materials from a Western-oriented view might not reflect cultural diversity or "conceptions of childhood and early childhood education" in cultures other than Western ones. Moreover, Prochner *et al.* (2008:200) observed from their study that the use of space and materials in the preschool reflects the meaning that a community attaches to the purpose of the preschool, albeit one often contested.

Although both Montessori preschools had materials organised according to 'the Western view', the children's learning might not have been expressed in these materials, due to an emphasis on the academic role of the preschool to reflect the wider society's "values and beliefs that support preparing children for formal schooling" (Prochner, *et al.*, 2008:200). However, despite operating in a similar environment, it is difficult to explain Belinda's approach that reflected developmentally appropriate practices and beliefs in the use of materials.

The beliefs expressed by the teachers about their non-use of learning materials support a *teacher-directed strategy*, where '*skills and competence*' are being refined by neo-liberal agendas as acceptable norms of competence in standardized tests (Tierney, in Robinson & Díaz, 2006:51). Therefore, to develop such skills kindergarten teachers tend to use isolated subject-based approaches in their teaching (Jambunathan & Caulfield, 2006:256; McMullen *et al.*, 2006:87).

The teacher-directed approaches used by the teachers contrast with those found by previous research into teachers embedded skills-based instruction within a DAP framework (Masseti & Bracken, 2008:11; Goldstein, 2007b:380; Wang *et al.*,

³⁶ Stella also doubled-up as a Head teacher, so occasionally, she withdrew to her office annexed to her class to attend to some parents visiting the school during learning time

2008:247). Geist and Baum (2005:28) agree that teachers who are committed to a DAP principles approach can still implement them, regardless of the amount of external pressure. I will address some of the factors affecting the use of DAP in the next chapter.

Teachers in this study consolidate the conclusion by Biersteker *et al.* (2008:232) and Republic of Kenya and UNESCO (2005:33) that one of the challenges facing ECD in Kenya is the overemphasis on formal learning tasks. Similar conclusions have been observed elsewhere (Goldstein, 2007b:2008; Cassidy, 2005). Therefore, I shall return to these issues in the subsequent chapters, as I consider the underlying factors influencing teachers' beliefs and the way the wider social factors have had an impact on how teachers' express children's educational experiences. However, Goldstein (2007b; 2008) notes that it is still possible to blend standards into a DAP framework, the approach that Belinda embraced, as she was able to create time for children to engage in free play. In the following section, I discuss how materials were used to bring life to Belinda's class.

5.4.3 THE EXCEPTION: CHILDREN ENGAGE IN FREE PLAY

5.4.3.1 Introduction

“Space and materials for preschoolers should enhance socialness, support a sense of emotional safety, and reflect respect for familial and cultural experiences of the child” (Jalongo *et al.*, 2004:144).

Belinda engaged children in a variety of free choice activities, which included play with empty tubs, play dough, writing on slates, and an assortment of Montessori materials³⁷. Prochner *et al.* (2008:197) define free play as “an activity carried out over a protracted period of time in which children choose the activity and their playmate as a means to foster higher order thinking, foster social relationships, and aid emotional growth”. However, Stipek (2007) notes that play need not be aimless, but rather it should embed learning in children's experiences. The Kenya Ministry of Education recommends a holistic approach to preschool learning through play-based learning (Republic of Kenya, 2006a:14-16). The standards document emphasizes that children should not learn through a *subject-based* approach, but instead they should engage in play-based activities. In relation to children's developmental age and learning, Kostelnik *et al.* (2004:46), refer to children as ‘motoric beings’ that use all their senses to satisfy their

³⁷ Note: Belinda is a Montessori trained teacher working in a DICECE preschool.

curiosity to learn. Smidt (2007:30) adds that all children learn all the time in the totality of their experiences.

Therefore, it is reasonable to facilitate this ‘multisensory curiosity’ as a learning avenue, by providing the relevant materials (Blakemore & Frith, 2005:461; Bredekamp & Copple, 1997:125; Broadhead, 2001:34; Crowther & Wellhousen, 2004:185; Montessori, 1820:23). Stimulating early learning environments enhances the brain’s neural connections (Blakemore & Frith, 2005; Gallagher, 2005:15), which develop according to each child’s access to multisensory experiences and their unique ways of repetitive interaction with such environments (Begley, in Kostelnik *et al.*, 2004:290; Gallagher, 2005:15-6).

In Belinda’s class, the children had daily opportunities to manipulate these materials, limitations of free movement notwithstanding. However, like her counterparts, she had no specified learning centres for the children to engage with freely. Instead, the children played as they sat or crouched on their chairs (as illustrated in images 13-18, below). Dudek (in Prochner *et al.*, 2008:197) observed that free play epitomizes the mature image of early childhood education, as opposed to direct teaching and school-like activities with little or no play. Framed from this view, Belinda’s preschool class portrayed a ‘*mature system*’. The following images in figure 34 (below) illustrate some of the free play activities with which children in Belinda’s class engaged as part of their free choice activities.

5.4.3.2 Use of materials: Develops children’s creativity

Our task regarding creativity is to help children climb their own mountains, as high as possible. No one can do more’ Loris Mallaguzi’s comment on the adult’s role in children’s emergence of creativity (Mallaguzi, in Edwards, 1998:77).

Belinda believes that children explore their creative potential, as they develop their physical dexterity during free playtime. In view of her comments, Belinda is likely to believe that children need to explore the learning materials freely, in order to apply their experiential knowledge, not only to develop their cognitive abilities but also their physical dexterity. Referring to a free choice activity, she said³⁸:

³⁸ The comments are based on children’s manipulation of playdough.

[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 ...the hands and an indirect preparation for writing ...it makes the muscles stronger...][BE01: 457; 459;463;465; That one is art... It helps the child to be creative. It develops...it helps the child to be creative and maybe, there are others, who have the talent-in modelling. So they have the chance to develop their talent][BE01:448-452]

Sandberg and Eriksson (2008:1) argue that the niche potential of an environment determines the level of children’s participation because “the more niches the individual has access to, the more opportunities for development they have”. Additionally, they write that individual children’s experience of the niche potential varies, depending on their differential perceptions and interpretations, and the availability of such niches. Harkness (cited by Prochner *et al.*, 2008:190) defines a related concept ‘developmental niche’ as a theoretical framework for studying cultural regulation of the microenvironment of the child.

Belinda’s approach to enlarge the children’s learning portrayed a variety of ‘child-niche potential’ experiences related to materials. These included bottle tops, detergent tubs, and margarine tubs, with which children expressed their cognitive and social abilities as they reconstructed their experiences (Seefeldt & Wasik, 2006:89; Smidt, 2006:54), such as combine harvesters, drawing water from a well, making a play dough ‘cell phone’ (image 16 in figure 34 below), among other experience-related objects.

Image 13: Free play with writing slates



Image 14: Free play with assorted empty tubs



Image 15: Free play with playdough



Image 16: Girl makes a 'phone call' with a 'cell phone' made of play dough



Image 17: Child engages with counters and numbers



Image 18: Free play with bottle tops

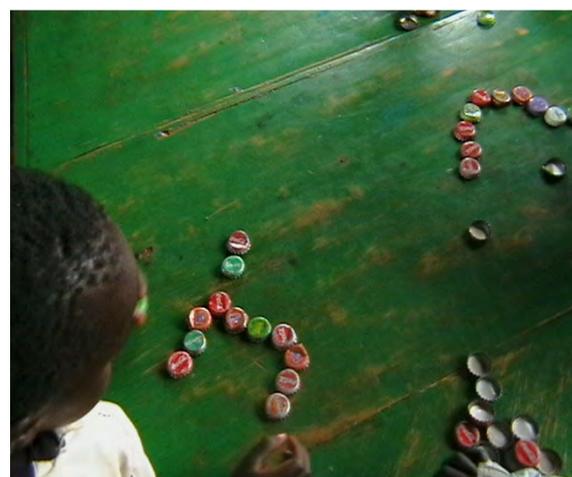


FIGURE 34: Images 13-18 free-play with assorted materials

Therefore, as children had opportunities to interact with the open-ended materials, they engaged with symbolic play, and so explored their creative potential. Belinda's approach to free play to tap into children's creativity is consistent with observations by Mallaguzi, (1998:75), that creativity arises not out of extraordinary, but of *daily experiences* that children have to engage freely. Muscari (2006:128) notes that time, space, and freedom, yields a creative potential among children.

The freedom enjoyed by the children as illustrated by vignette 4 resulted in a diversity of responses to these open-ended materials. However, although Belinda moved among children during free play, she verbalised little during the children's freeplay, consistent

with Liddell's observation (in Prochner *et al.*, 2008:196), that teachers in a South African research used less language with children during play. Walsh (in Kontos & Dunn, 1993:55) also noted that caregivers might be reluctant to interact with children in active way, especially if they subscribe to the maturational theory. The behaviourist might also think it is intrusive to get involved in children's play (Farran *et al.*, in Kontos & Dunn, 1993:56). This might also reflect Belinda's Montessori training that recommends that teachers ought to observe the children than engage verbally with them as Montessori cautions 'the educator must, to a the greatest possible extent limit his intervention, yet he must not allow the child to weary himself in an undue effort of auto-education' (Montessori, 1920). In another observation sessions, as I observed the children in free play my thoughts are expressed in vignette 4 below.

VIGNETTE 4: Free play with open-ended materials (Belinda's class)

...then the children engage in an activity of free choice that the teacher cues its start by removing an item and placing it on one of the children's tables. Each child rushes to the shelf to pick items of choice, (These include empty tubs of domestic consumer products such as, "omo," blue-band", "superbrite" containers, etc').

Using some item, I hear one child talk about her train, while another has made a stuck of tubs. One girl in particular has heaped blue-band tubs and is symbolically playing at a very high level. She asks another child to "wash" the utensil, and in fact, with an imaginary gesture "pours" some "water" to her tub for use. The receiving girl "uses" the water as the other girl literally moves out a few steps out of the table, to "fetch" some more "water," making gestures as if "drawing water from a "well". She simulates the act by pulling up the "rope" as she talks about what she is doing.

All the children are free in their choice of how to engage with their loca materials, except a few of them who seem idle, for no apparent reason. Meanwhile all the children go on with this activity for about one hour. The teacher goes round to observe what the children are doing, without any verbalization (borders on disengagement, I think, or just routine!)

As they complete the activity, the children return the items to the shelf and swarm around me to engage in conversation. One child asks me how my children are in Kiswahili "habari ya watoto wako?" (How are your children?). I reply in the affirmative. They are very eager to talk to me. One girl (whom I observed as the baby of the class) holds my hand and refuses to let go (I feel captive,[but I sense a need in her for emotional proximity]-that I cannot continue with my video capture, so I press the "stop" button (well, this is part of research as well, so I tell myself). I engage her in conversation. I ask her whether she will go to my home with me (more to ease conversation, and as part of a routine conversation- fillers when an adult talks to a child in my community), to which she consents. She continues holding my hand, literally making it impossible for me to do anything else.

The teacher then asks them to go out and wash their hands in preparation for their mid morning snack of milk and bread. They obey and are soon back to take their snack hurriedly, before dashing out for break for outdoor play; for the next one hour (again, like in all my research classes, I observe a high sense of order and obedience),.

Later, I learn that this lovely 'baby' of the class is actually an orphaned child, under the care of the paternal uncle. "How sweetly innocent to be young, oblivious of what life could have been"... I think to myself...as I drift back in time, to my own world of a torrent of emotions...Yes, tomorrow is always after all, another day. (Yes teacher Belinda interrupts my stupor as she invites me for a cup of tea, to which I gratefully accept- I am famished!).

Nuanced: The children have a truly 'free choice' engagement activity; although the teacher does not scaffold any of their activities. Perhaps this is part of quiet time for free choice that inhibits her from "interrupting," or maybe this is Belinda's approach to free play.

5.4.3.3 Materials enhance children's concentration span

“The genuinely healthy child will be always active, he will employ himself” (Froebel, 1899:59).

Belinda's comment below highlights the need to develop *children's concentration span* as a foundation for their concentration also in learning tasks:

[BE: They concentrate, we use the bottle tops to count...you will find some other children counting one... others built...they construct things like towers... It helps the child to balance them so it helps concentration also...the child tries to balance the bottle tops, concentrates... the concentration part it helps the child to ...pause...to concentrate even more in class...]
[BE01:473;477;479;481]

Moreover, Belinda believed that familiar materials encourage children to interact with them more. This might express her belief in the importance of *transfer of learning*. She also felt that the teachers should aim at making learning materials that are familiar to the children, and which connect home experiences to those found at school. Her comment illustrates this:

[BE: They also see the omo packs 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: 70-74]

For Belinda, open-ended materials offer children unlimited ways to learn, and through free play, individual children gain competence in problem-solving, imagination, creativity and task persistence (Crowther & Wellhousen, 2004:187). Gallagher (2005:18) and Kostelnik *et al.* (2004:49) observe that children need a variety of multi-sensory related experiences to enhance their brain development. Although Belinda did not allude to the social benefits of play, opportunities to play provide children with a chance to negotiate their own social space as they interact socially with other children (Broadhead, 2001; Katz, 1995:112; Seefeldt & Wasik, 2006:89), while they share the limited play resources. In this way, children develop a sense of being individuals within the community (Prochner *et al.*, 2008:197).

Kostelnik *et al.* (2004:49) emphasize the significance of social experiences through which “children construct knowledge internally, continually shaping, expanding and

reorganizing their mental structures”, as they *construct* their knowledge or are *instructed* to gain knowledge. Again, Belinda’s reference to the development of the *concentration span* and *creativity* emphasized children’s cognitive and physical development, rather than their social and emotional development in learning.

5.4.3.4 Summary of Belinda’s beliefs about teaching materials

In conclusion, Belinda emphasized children’s engagement with both Montessori and locally available materials. She believed that children develop their creative potential as well as their physical dexterity through the materials, a belief reflected in the way she engaged children with the materials during learning. As mentioned above, she was able to use a nested approach to children’s educational experiences. Therefore, I advance, albeit cautiously, some reasons that might have contributed to Belinda’s nested approach³⁹. I presume that Belinda’s unique approach relate to her experience. Her ‘ideal’ approach to teaching was due to her two-year experience in the field, a short duration that had several implications: firstly, it suggests that she might still *uphold* the ideals of child development. Secondly, she had not experienced ‘*colleague pressure*’ that would require her to revise her teaching approach. Thirdly, being in her second year of teaching preschool in general, and this school in particular, she has not presented children for interview, which would have pressured her towards teaching for academic success. Fourthly, as a teacher responsible for this class, with the assistance of the head teacher, she probably experienced a psychological *cushioning* from parental pressure, because she was not dealing with parents directly in her position as a junior teacher. In addition, as an employee of the university she did not experience a similar level of pressure to retain her employment by focusing on academic subjects. Finally, the head teacher’s assistance to Belinda was advantageous in easing her workload, especially that she had only 15 children in her class, which made it easy for her to engage them. It appears from Belinda’s experience that she was yet to experience real ‘*high pressure points*’. This, I argue, explains why Belinda used an embedded approach to children’s learning.

³⁹ Belinda was the most recently graduated teacher with only two years teaching experience as compared to her colleagues who had between 9-12 years. She is also Montessori trained, working in a DICECE preschool. Currently she co-teaches the same class with the school head teacher.

Belinda's experience contrasts with that of the other teachers in the study⁴⁰, who had more years of teaching experience, taught their classes alone, and who had presented children for the Standard One entry interview. Moreover, the remainder of the teachers mentioned that they experienced colleague influence to vary their content and method. Montessori teachers are employees of the parents. All the factors that differentiate Belinda's approach to use of an embedded approach, and the silence of materials in the other classes, are ecological factors, which I will connect to the four levels of the bioecological theory as I link teacher-practices to a meta-theory in voyage seven. In the next section, I consider beliefs about the approach to scheduling of children's activities as part of accessing an holistic view of the DAEP.

5.5 THEME 3: SCHEDULING OF CHILDREN'S ACTIVITIES

The act of planning involves purpose, organisation, foresight, preparation and deliberate decision making (Kostelnik *et al.*, 2004:67).

Two approaches will guide my discussion on the nature of scheduling observed: the *general structure* of the schedule and the *subject-based approach* to the children's educational experiences. MacNaughton and Williams (2004:41) define scheduling "as a teaching technique, [which] involves taking decisions about how to organize the tempo and duration of current and future interactions between children, between children and adults, and between people and materials". Scheduling in early childhood settings is an important strategy of using children's time at school in productive ways, besides providing security as part of school routine (Seefeldt & Wasik, 2006:141; Warner & Sower, 2005:221). Seefeldt and Wasik (2006:141-142) discuss two approaches to plan the children's school day, namely the schedule approach and the general framework approach. In the former, the teacher-directs and determines the general activities of the day, while in the latter, the teacher directs movement from one activity to another, but with the children determining the pace of the activity. Figure 35 (below) illustrates a summary of the observed approach to scheduling.

⁴⁰ Although Lenora was an employee of the University, she expressed her fears about losing children to other schools that perform better, and the possibility of losing her employment. Stella and Enid seemed concerned about meeting parents' expectations. See the discussion in voyager 6 for an elaborate perspective of the 'pressure points'.

Theme	Sub-themes
Scheduling	Sequenced presentation (introduce with example, give task, assess task, end the subject) Scheduled subject-content (math, English, Kiswahili) Forecast completion (each approximately 30mins per subject). Scheming and use of daily diary

FIGURE 35: A summary of scheduling experiences

In the current study, all the teachers blended both the general frameworks approach and the schedule approach in a variety of ways. However, apart from Belinda’s class, in which children engaged with materials, the other teachers focused on a subject-based approach, nested within both the general and schedule approach to children’s educational experiences. Figure 36 (below) portray teachers’ approach to scheduling.

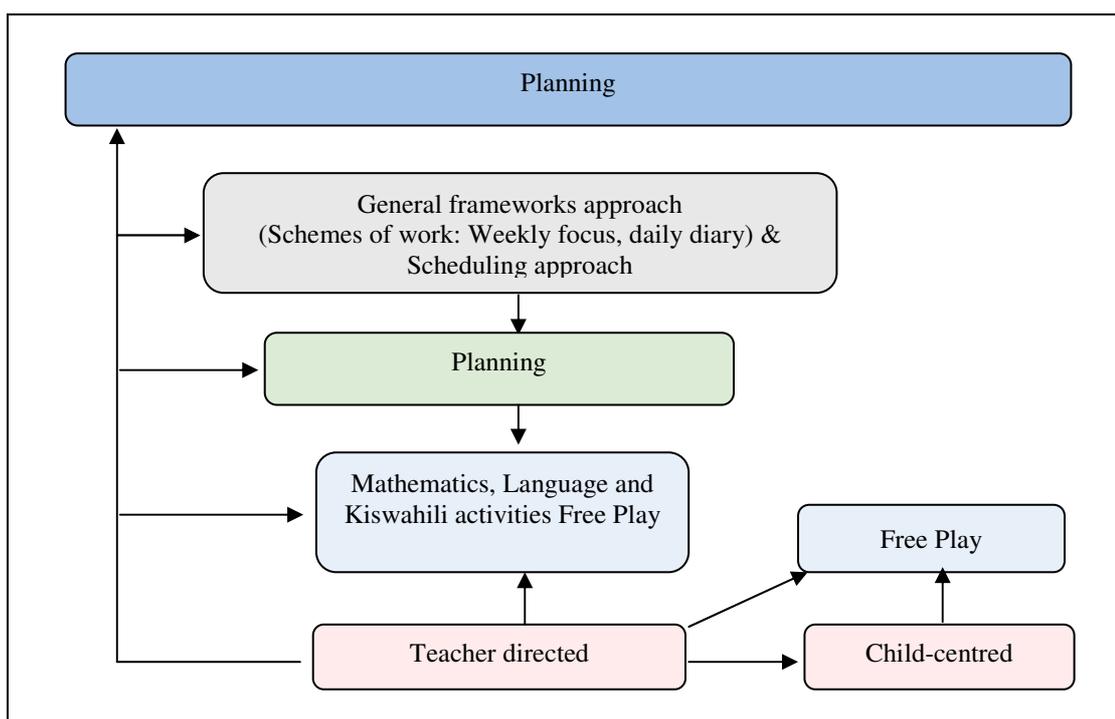


FIGURE 36: A summary of teachers’ approach to scheduling

Teachers using the weekly focus adhered to the general frameworks approach, to determine the overall content of the activities. The arrow that runs up emphasizes how the teacher decided on the subjects to cover, and sometimes the materials for children to use (as illustrated by Belinda’s cuing strategy to remove or take back the materials to the cupboard). The scheduling approach used a subject-based approach, by which children

moved from one subject to the next. Free play fitted within Belinda's general plan as it was also teacher-directed.

5.5.1 SCHEDULING OF CHILDREN'S TASKS: THE GENERAL NATURE OF PLANNING

"Schedules and routines provide a sense of order, safety, and security for both children and adults" (Seefeldt & Wasik, 2006:72).

The following section addresses the way the teachers organised their schedule from a general framework approach. Establishing routines and schedules helps children to adapt to continuity as well as predictability to their school time (Bottini & Grossman, 2005:275; Kostelnik *et al.*, 2004:147). It also serves as a behaviour management strategy (Cassidy & Lawrence, 2000:198; Seefeldt & Wasik, 2006:115). All teachers had specific schedules as they emphasized:

[EN: What I am going to teach, eeh today I have started with English then tomorrow I am thinking of starting with Kiswahili Normally, I usually give myself around thirty minutes in every subject.][EN01:153-155; EN01:275]

[BE: You just plan that today I am going to have language; tomorrow I will be having maybe free choice. You just plan it yourself][BE01:295]

[LE: We follow the activities that we have schemed. Yah and we...each and every day we have to plan for tomorrows work][LE01A:368; 372]

[ST: Okay, I do my weekly focus, whereby I plan for the week... I did not have time to do with my class... If it is not done...mm, that weekly focus will be helping me][ST01:391]

All the teachers in this study organised the schedules on a strict on-time schedule, allowing little or no variation to the children's educational experience. The teachers' comments illustrate a teacher-directed schedule. Belinda and Lenora mentioned flexibility, but this was not reflected in what they planned for children. They commented:

[BE: When you see that the children have they get less concentration on whatever you are telling them, you just change to another activity...so you use the time that you see they can concentrate; so when they do not concentrate, you break into something else][BE01:267; 410; 412]

[LE: Tomorrow I..., the lesson plan or the scheme of work, will not control me because these children I have to take care of them; I must see that they have understood what I taught yesterday...I would have to repeat][LE01:376; 378; 380]

Therefore, despite flexible thinking expressed by Lenora and Belinda about their plans to accommodate children's tempo and interest, this did not translate into children's educational experiences. Even with Belinda, who used variable learning approaches, the schedule still focused on variety within the group. The teachers' comments illustrate how a subject-based approach might limit their flexibility in scheduling to accommodate individual children's tempo and interests. As observed, in most instances, the teachers used a group approach to teach, which required the children to engage with similar activities at the same time.

A developmentally appropriate plan embraces the ecological context of the classroom, in relation to family and community, as well as individual differences of children's ability and their tempo of learning (Seefeldt & Wasik, 2006:141). Therefore, a child-friendly schedule is likely to embrace specific activities that develop the whole child, have measurable objectives, and content that children need to learn using appropriate materials (Kostelnik, 2004:67). A developmentally appropriate schedule incorporates variety in the learning tasks, and supports individual as well as group activity as it also includes balance between child-chosen and teacher-directed activities (Kostelnik *et al.*, 2004:147-149; Seefeldt & Wasik, 2006:72).

Apart from embracing a timetable for routine and predictability (Seefeldt & Wasik, 2006:115), the teachers had specified content to focus on as part of the day's activities. The prescribed content increased the schoolwork for children to the extent that the teachers believed they had to rush them through the learning activities due to lack of adequate time. Stella's and Lenora's comments exemplify this interpretation:

[ST: because you see here in [Tumaini] you have to teach numbers even up to hundred (100) [ST03:820-01].ST: Take away all sums vertically and horizontally, reading both Kiswahili and English, fluently, Like, things like sentences][ST03:822-01]

Therefore, the subject-based, group approach to scheduling reinforced the rigid schedule observed. This finding adds to the voice of Geist and Baum (2005:31), who caution that despite the 'text-book approach' to teaching, teachers still need to adopt the recommended curriculum to children's needs. Concerning the rush through content coverage, they warn that "children lack time to gain any deeper understanding".

Rigid schedules either exclude or rush children with a slow tempo through the learning activities, since such plans might not accommodate them (Geist & Baum, 2005:31; Gallagher, in Gallagher, 2005:16). As observed, the high schedule appeared to exclude children with slow tempo, since a “fast paced approach may interfere with real learning” (Gallagher, 2005:16). In addition, Fosnot (in Geist & Baum, 2005:31) advises that some children will fall behind, while others are likely to be ahead of the textbook approach, in which case it disadvantages both groups. Gallagher (2005:16) and OERI (in Geist & Baum, 2005:31) propose that children need unhurried time to develop problem-solving skills.

In this study there were rigid schedules that gave little variation to what the teachers had planned. This rigidity was evident during one observation where a grass mower-tractor arrived to cut grass at the Montessori preschool compound. Despite the children’s curiosity about the presence of the tractor, the teacher went on with her planned lesson, notwithstanding a foregone “teachable moment” in the “incidental learning opportunity” potentially provided by the lawn-mowing experience (Klein & Chen, 2001:31).

Neuman and Roskos (2005:26) conclude that long hours of routine work for children reduce their motivation to learn. Therefore, although the teachers’ group approach to children’s educational experiences maximized their time at school, these strict-on time schedules, where children had very limited flexibility for their own chosen activities (Miller, 2005:258; Miller & Smith, 2004:126), was less motivating for them, as they engaged in “boring kindergarten seatwork” (Goldstein, 2007b:390). This observation corresponds to Li’s (2003) study, in which teachers emphasized on-schedule approach to teaching. Jingbo and Elicker (2005:140) observe from their study that the routine of ‘educators’ and ‘educated’, portrayed teachers who were more concerned to cover their pre-planned routines at the expense of attending to children’s emotional needs. Burts *et al.* (in Charlesworth *et al.*, 1993:18) concluded that that workbooks, waiting and transition were the most stressful activities for children. In this study, teachers’ emphasis on written work and interview certainly negated emotional needs of children.

5.5.2 SCHEDULING OF CHILDREN’S TASKS: SUBJECT-BASED PLANS

“The younger the learner, the larger proportion of time should be allocated to informal activities” (Katz, 1995:114).

Another sub-theme that emerged from scheduling was the use of a subject-based approach. As opposed to thematic teaching, the teachers organised the children's learning schedules by subject content. Therefore, the teachers seemed to emphasize their belief that children should be engaged in similar educational activities at any one time, using predominantly teacher-directed activities.

[ST: ...if I am doing math, I would like all my children to be doing math, not the rest to be doing English, the rest will be... you know, these are small children][ST01:329]

[EN: When I introduce number one up to 10, the time I am introducing 11 to 20 I will have to introduce it as a group. I will not take one at a time; because if I leave this child behind, the other one will go ahead and this one will remain there, and then when, the parent come][EN02:434; 439]

[BE: You know you have to teach the children mathematics, language, so also you have to plan for that. Also, general knowledge; like they learn parts of the body][BE01:420-425]

[LE: So I divide if it is one hour reading and the following hour is writing][LE02:557-561]

All teachers' comments reinforce their preference for *structured* subject-based content (Foote *et al.*, 2004:141; Jambunathan & Caulfield, 2006:256). Their approach contradicts a DAP framework plan that recommends a variety of learning approaches for children, including exploratory play, guided discovery, problem-solving, discussions, demonstrations and direct instruction to incorporate both child-initiated and teacher-directed learning opportunities (Hujala, 2002:101; Kostelnik *et al.*, 2004:82; Seefeldt & Wasik, 2006:141). Instead, it reflects the observation by McMullen *et al.* (2006:87) that teachers in traditional classrooms are likely to use pre-planned schedules, within teacher-directed approaches.

Stipek (2004:552) cautions that teachers prefer scripted teaching in which they use prepared materials, rather than handle individual differences or use 'a prescriptive curriculum' (Charlesworth *et al.*, 1993:14). Moreover, for teachers to embrace a DAP approach, which requires them to plan continuous assessment of the children, do an ongoing development of the curriculum, and have constant interactions with the family is a challenge (Geist & Baum, 2005:33). Charlesworth *et al.* (1993:14) conclude that teachers who are accustomed to a prescriptive curriculum struggle to implement a DAP flexible approach.

While planning is a useful measure of accountability by the teacher, too rigid a plan will negate children's disposition to learn by manipulating materials. Since children are still young, they require learning through play (Gallagher, 2005:16), as they are also fascinated with the tasks before them (Seefeldt & Wasik, 2006:140). In addition, a fast schedule will frustrate children with a slow tempo in their task-completion. The teacher will also feel stretched to cover content in her weekly focus. Moreover, long periods of teacher-directed activity are stressful for the children (Charlesworth *et al.*, 1993:14). The whole group, non-variable and teacher-directed schedules that characterised the observed lessons in the study, contrast with a DAP schedule which should facilitate children's individual differences in tempo and ability (Kostelnik *et al.*, 2004:89; MacNaughton & Williams, 2004:46). Variable group activities can also qualify as DAP if they precede activities where children apply conceptual information supplied by the teacher during whole group activities (Fowell & Lawton, in Charlesworth *et al.*, 1993:14). Neuman and Roskos (2005:25-6) conclude that long hours of worksheets might not be fruitful for children's overall literacy development. The section following is a general discussion on children's tasks.

5.5.3 SCHEDULING OF CHILDREN'S TASKS: A GENERAL CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the teachers' concern to *cover* content examined at the primary entry interview affected their schedules. To prepare children for transition to standard one, and to pass the standard one interview, was the concern of both top class teachers. To illustrate, Enid scheduled for thirty-minute lessons as she comments, [EN01:153; also vignette6], using a subject-based approach, which she concludes with a written assessment. Stella emphasized the *rush* in her words:

[ST: 'we just introduce the sounds, quickly into two letters double sounds quickly to three letter words, quickly to sentences...'] [ST03:405; 411-2]

Concerns about the haste expressed by the teachers in the current study are consistent with the findings by Cassidy and Lawrence (2000), that teachers in their sample rushed their children through the different tasks to protect them from boredom. In addition, Goldstein (2007b:387) concludes that the standards expectations limit Kindergarten teachers' content selection. However, the rationale differs from those given by the teachers in the current study, who covered as much writing content as possible to remain

accountable to parents and to prepare children for the assessment in the transition interview. The findings from this study echo those of Jingbo and Elicker (20005:139), that teachers in their sample focused on pre-planned routines that disregard the feelings of children.

Nevertheless, because of the highly structured schedule, children in these preschool classes displayed positive affinity and cooperation with the teacher, who kept them occupied them. Seefeldt and Wasik (2006:115) observe that since routines and schedules imply expected behaviour, planning is an effective discipline strategy. My observation contrasts with Winsler and Carlton's (2003) finding that children in their study spent less time in focused learning activities, showing less sustained attention to tasks.

All the teachers concurred that they were autonomous in their planning, in contrast to the finding by Wang *et al.* (2008:244) that their Chinese preschool sample sometimes changed their teaching plans to reflect their directors' beliefs. A discussion of the assessment practices follows in the next section.

5.6 THEME 4: APPROACH TO CHILDREN'S ASSESSMENT

5.6.1 INTRODUCTION

In addition to learning more about how individual children think, learn, develop and behave, educators need to collect and document information to inform instruction, to identify children who might benefit from special help or additional health services, and to report children's progress to their families (Kostelnik *et al.*, 2004:183-184).

In the current study, the discussion on assessment is limited to its forms observed in children's educational experiences. The teachers' assessment embraced two approaches, namely choral reading and task completion, differentiated among children in the baby class, but undifferentiated among those in the top classes. Language tasks included identifying UPPER CASE and lower case letters, matching words and their pictures or objects and their functions, and filling in the missing letters. Children engaged in these tasks on a rotational basis. The teachers' illustrate their approach to assessment:

[LE: So it is good to be on the chart so that when that child is defeated can just turn back and see so that they may rewrite so that I can know the child that has known][LE01A:1052; 1064]

[ST: I write the numbers and ask the children to read, so that I will know the child who still has a problem with recognition of numbers, eeh but this one automatically is based on number recognition] [ST03:216; 218-01]

[EN ...and when it comes to dictation, most of them are weak in spelling. When I ask each one of them to see how fast they are in spelling, because when you do it every single day, you will see that they participate more often][EN01:284]

All the children's assessment focused on a subject-based approach, as illustrated in section 5.3.3, regarding the teaching strategy embracing copying and task-completion. Their views illustrate a link to these activities to assessment:

[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] [BE01:168; 170]

[LE: say if it is Kiswahili, English, Math, Civics, environmental, science art and craft it is English, if the child is weak in English, or is doing well in Math, there are some signs that we use][LE01: 180-02]

[ST: Because after reading I can ask a few children to face the other side or close their eyes...and ask the children one by one ...to write for me those numbers...so my objective here is to see that the children acquire the skills of reading the numbers][ST03:252; 258; 262-01]

[EN: ...If we do reading, even if they do not name the picture or fill in whatever we have read at least they have to write it because it will keep on reminding them even if they do not spell or do nini, writing of names. Eeh you will find that maybe today I have decided to just write for them reading eeh mat cat rat spoon and then I just tell them to copy that, might, that one will be enough for at least to remember what they have learned][EN02:147]

Children also had written task-based completions as illustrated in figure 37 and 38 from Montessori and DICECE classes respectively. It appears that the teachers assessed children for their cognitive competences, such as ability to recall, associate, and count correctly, read correctly, recognize numbers, among other subject-based cognitive-skill oriented assessment. It appears that assessment focused on 'academic' subjects or aspects of cognitive. The teachers rarely talked about other non-cognitive related assessments, apart from Stella who believed that assessment serves to screen children with disability [ST: so that you cannot, you know about the child if the child has disabilities or ... [ST02:71].

Class	Forms of assessment	
Sub-themes /classes	On the spot <i>group choral reading</i>	<i>Task-based</i> follow-up activity and marking
MONMID	Picture/colour identification, capital and small letters	Differentiated letter copying[j];[u, v, w, x, y, z]; [q, r, s, t] matching numbers, matching shapes, simple addition, write 1-20, ‘add these sums [2+1=_]; [2+5=-];(see addenda 12-14)
MONTOP	Choral reading; [tough, bat, box, aunt etc-; ‘I have a pen; what is your name; they can sing-see images 6-10]	Write number 1-50; add [60+30=-; 10+80=_; 20+30=_; 50+40=_; 30+30=_; 60+30=_; 70+20=_; See addendum 14 and also images day 3; ‘circle the correct one’ (drawing of an object and two words e.g. hand drawn with words ‘head or hand’]

FIGURE 37: Children’s assessment experiences:-Montessori preschool

Class	Forms of assessment	
DICTOP	Picture-reading, number reading, word-rhymes, Kiswahili syllabic reading, read the following sentences [the ball is big, come to the car; the ship has shut the door] etc (see addendum 12 and additional images on CD)]	Write a-z; change the following [bag-BAG; dog-DOG; [write numbers 1-100]; [subtract the following; 30-10;40-10;30-30;70-30; add 30+50; 50+30; 10+30](see addendum 12; see additional images on CD)
DICMID	Choral reading [a for-; letter b for- etc.]; colour identification, [D1S1] (see additional images on CD)	Copy the numbers [6; 6; 6;7;7;7;7;]; [5;5;5]; [7;7;7; 8;8;8;] (see additional images on CD)

FIGURE 38: Children’s assessment experiences: - DICECE preschool

All teachers used paper-and-pencil and letter recognition forms of assessments, which are by nature limited in providing a comprehensive appraisal of children’s progress (Seefeldt & Wasik, 2006:149). Seefeldt and Wasik (2006:149) note that “all young children [under Nine years]...have limited vocabulary skills, are unable to think abstractly, and their understanding of the world is coloured by egocentric thinking”. Therefore, it is unlikely that one method of assessment can give an accurate appraisal.

By focusing on children's written tasks that were marked at the end of each lesson, the teachers contradicted a DAP approach to assessment which should use variable approaches. These include the use of checklists and rating scales, various forms of observations, unstructured interviews, children's work samples, and portfolios, in addition to performance standards benchmarks, as multiple ways of assessing children, not only for their learning tasks, but also for their behavioural dispositions (Seefeldt & Wasik, 2006:148-150; Geist & Baum, 2005:33). Kostelnik *et al.* (2004:183) write that:

...[because] children think, learn, develop and behave across time, educators need to collect and document information to inform instruction, and identify children who might benefit from special help or additional health services, and to report children's progress to their families.

However, the foremost concern for the teachers is to equip children with functional literacy as part of effective educational experiences, as succinctly expressed by Lenora:

LE: That we give children such work or we so that the child may know the capital letters and to differentiate small] [letters][LE02:196]

Also evident from this study is that the participants believe that assessment should provide feedback about children's learning needs, as it also gives feedback to their parents. Although a DAP approach to assessment recommends that preschool teachers should embrace *authentic assessment* to appraise children's developmental domains for future learning, (Kostelnik *et al.*, 2004:187; Seefeldt & Wasik, 2008:149), teachers in the current study predominantly used a content and subject-based approach to assess children's educational experiences. This approach limited assessment to the children's cognitive abilities necessary for school transition, through worksheets and reading ability, thus excluding talents such as musical, artistic and any other domains of development that are non-cognitive.

The teachers in the current study restricted their assessment of children to *academic tasks*, reflecting a similar finding by Li (2003). They believed that children should acquire skills-based knowledge related to early maths and language literacy. However, such an approach undermines children's mastery, effort and their ability to seek challenging experiences (Katz & Chard, in Katz, 1995:113; Fosnot & OERI, both in Geist & Baum, 2005:31). Therefore, although the teachers also stressed motor development through writing, this emphasis related to the writing as a psychomotor skill

requisite to written assessments (Kostelnik *et al.*, 200:349). Their emphasis on academic skills attainment reflects the Indian experience reported by Jambunathan and Caulfield, (2006:256), and the Singapore experience observed by David *et al.* (in Miller & Smith, 2004:123). However, this contrasts with the Australian experience, where kindergarten teachers downplay academic tasks and focus on socio-emotional skills (Miller & Smith, 2004:123).

Consequently, the subject-based approach to assessment reflects the narrowed down approach to the concepts assessed, even taught, to the cognitive domain only, which exclude the social, emotional and physical domains of development (Neuman & Roskos, 2005:25). For example, Lenora's comments emphasize how the interview requirements have affected her teaching of mathematical tasks. She exposes children to what she calls 'vertical' and 'horizontally' arranged sums, which appear to require different levels of abstraction from children (see image 26 {above}, showing vertically arranged sums). In her words, Lenora said this of her approach to develop children's numerical abilities:

[LE: So that is why I will also try to give them on those different ways that I know so that [when] child...go and meet such sums there, in the interview, they will be able to do them. You see I try to give them these sums I will write them in different ways either the vertical or horizontal ...they will give in different ways should be able to identify or know because now when they go for their interview][LE02:78-88]

5.6.2 ASSESSMENT: A GENERAL DISCUSSION

Although a DAP approach to assessment recommends that preschool teachers should embrace *authentic assessment* to appraise children's developmental domains for future learning (Kostelnik *et al.*, 2004:187; Seefeldt & Wasik, 2008:149), teachers in the current study restricted assessment to *academic tasks*, reflecting a similar finding by (Li, 2003). They believed that children should acquire skills-based knowledge related to early arithmetic and language literacy. This emphasis on assessing the cognitive domains also contradicts the standards recommendations in Kenya, that preschool teachers should focus on children's holistic development (Republic of Kenya, 2006a:14), embracing cognitive, social, emotional and physical domains. Therefore, a skills-based assessment might not reflect its capacity to evaluate realistically all children's domains of development. Culbertson and Jalongo (1999) argue for an inclusive approach to

assessment beyond paper and pencil workbooks that might not reflect all domains of children's learning.

In the entire discussion, the teachers did not mention any other skill that children should possess outside of academic tasks. A narrow focus on assessment has implications for the content of children's educational experiences. For example, observations from this study indicate that children had fewer opportunities to develop their creative talent in the arts. The only artistic observation was in the drawing of their trip experience in Lenora's class and one other in Stella's class. The assessment focused more on the '*do it right*' approach, which undermined their task persistence and competence (Stipek *et al.*, 1995:220; Stipek, 2007). This structured approach does not favour the emergence of creativity, much less the freedom required to think beyond the '*borders*'. Moreover, the development of higher order thinking is limited, because tasks such as simple memory and recall, required children to engage at lower cognitive levels through meaningless recitation (Stipek, 2007:741).

With the exception of Belinda's' beliefs and practices that balanced between a child-centred and a teacher-centred approach, despite using a group approach, the rest of the teachers limited children's assessment to their cognitive domain, using rote-learning approaches (Prochner & Kabiru, 2008:128), such as copying choral chants, simple recall, copying and recognition, matching, and addition and subtraction. The teachers in the current study focused assessment on cognitive-related skills, consistent with the observations by Jambunathan and Caulfield (2006:256), that teachers in their Indian sample preferred paper-and-pencil assessments, but which also seemed to reflect the predominant Indian culture inclined to didactic instruction and learning. This level of assessment undermines learning-related behaviours, such as motivation and competence (Stipek *et al.*, 1995:220).

A focus on academics originates from a demand for children's literacy-based learning which limits learning to the acquisition of the 3Rs (Pui-Wah & Stimpson, 2004; DeVries, 2002; Kieff & Casbergue, 2000). In my view, this is a readily accessible approach to accountability, whose assessment is open to short-term appraisal. For instance, it is easier to access the 3Rs than it is to assess a child's emotional development. In addition, stakeholders value the cognitive focus in children's learning more than the child

development domains. However, this ‘one-shot’ approach to testing, is likely to demoralise children in their learning (Isenberg & Jalongo, in Culbertson & Jalongo, 1999).

Vartuli (1999:508) conclude from their study in the US that teachers’ failure to embrace DAP reflects the pressure they face from local state mandates, school culture and peer pressure. Findings from previous studies resonate with the Kenyan experience, where focus on assessment at the primary and secondary school level has influenced preschool practices on assessment, creating ‘the elementary error’ in which approaches used for children at higher levels is thought appropriate for preschool children (Bredekamp & Rosegrant, in Charlesworth *et al.*, 1993:11).

Therefore, the focus on academics is not surprising in the Kenyan context, where academic performance in a competitive primary school system and entire school system in general, has influenced the observed narrow forms of assessment towards children’s education experiences (Biersteker *et al.*, 2008:243; Mwaura *et al.*, 2008:128; Prochner & Kabiru, 2008:128). The Kenyan experience reflects experiences elsewhere, such as the practices in India (Jambunathan & Caulfield, 2006:256), South Korea, and Taiwan (McMullen *et al.*, 2005:453-4).

Notwithstanding the focus on assessment on a subject-based approach, a positive social and emotional climate characterized all the classes in the study. The positive social and emotional climate resulted from a highly structured environment, in which children were always on-task, leaving them with little space to display negative emotions. The behavioural benefits of a skills-based approach to children’s educational experiences observed in the current study correlates with an observation by Massetti and Bracken, (2008:10), that children in a skills-based environments displayed few social and behavioural problems. This contrast with research that found children’s negative social and emotional behaviour are related to teacher-directed classrooms (e.g. Stipek *et al.*, 1995:220). However, the positive outcomes observed in the current study contrast with those by Charlesworth *et al.* (1993:21), that children attending DIP classes experienced more stress. Although the current study did not measure levels of stress among children, they displayed less negative behaviour throughout the study, teacher-directed activities notwithstanding.

The teachers' approach to assessment confirm previous studies that teachers tend to focus assessment on the areas that the larger society values (Pretti-Frontczak, Kowalski, Barr & Brown, both in Kowalski *et al.*, 2005:24). The latter's findings on assessment indicate that preschool teachers tended to value those skills assessed by national tools such as their MAPS (Measurement and Planning System), which is used to measure accountability outcomes in the USA (Kowalski *et al.*, 2005:31). In addition, Timperley *et al.* (2004:35-6) suggest that there are disparate expectations of skills required for transition to primary school between kindergarten and primary school teachers. Whereas the former group value skills-focused teaching over socio-emotional skills, the latter group value socio-emotional skills.

The focus on the *cognitive tasks* tested by the primary entry *interview* is a good preparation for the children to cope with the immediate primary school and beyond. It was evident from the observations that, although the content covered, for example in mathematical skills, was above the ability of five-year-olds, the children, especially at the top classes, did not struggle to complete them, rather completing them swiftly and correctly most of the time (see images 6-10 {above} for an illustration of the correctness of tasks). In the following section, I discuss the theme on children's individuality.

5.7 THEME 5: CHILDREN'S INDIVIDUALITY

5.7.1 INTRODUCTION

"Today's classrooms are melting pots of children from diverse backgrounds" (Seefeldt & Wasik, 2006:60).

This section discusses teachers' beliefs about children's individuality, after examining their beliefs about children's individuality. It concludes with a general discussion that incorporates literature on children's differences. Each child is a unique individual, in line with Muscari's (2006:75) definition of uniqueness as "what makes a person an individual and allows her [him] to express herself [himself] in her [his] own way". Consideration of children's individuality embraces the principle that there are inherent differences among children because of their diverse social, emotional, physical and cultural backgrounds (Jalongo *et al.*, 2004:144; Klein & Chen, 2001:31; Kostelnik *et al.*, 2004:51). Muscari (2006:76) further notes that variety among children is inexhaustible, since it embraces multiple dimensions. Klein and Chen (2001:31) argue that a DAP approach to children's

education intricately links not only to the cultural setting, but also to backgrounds, abilities and interests of children.

5.7.2 TEACHERS' BELIEFS ABOUT CHILDREN'S INDIVIDUALITY

The teachers in the study acknowledged that children differ in their *cognitive* and *tempo ability* besides *inter-cultural* differences, which in turn affects their learning dispositions. From their comments, the teachers believed that since children display differential ability, they should be sensitive to these differences. Figure 39 (below) illustrates some of the teachers' beliefs about children's tempo.

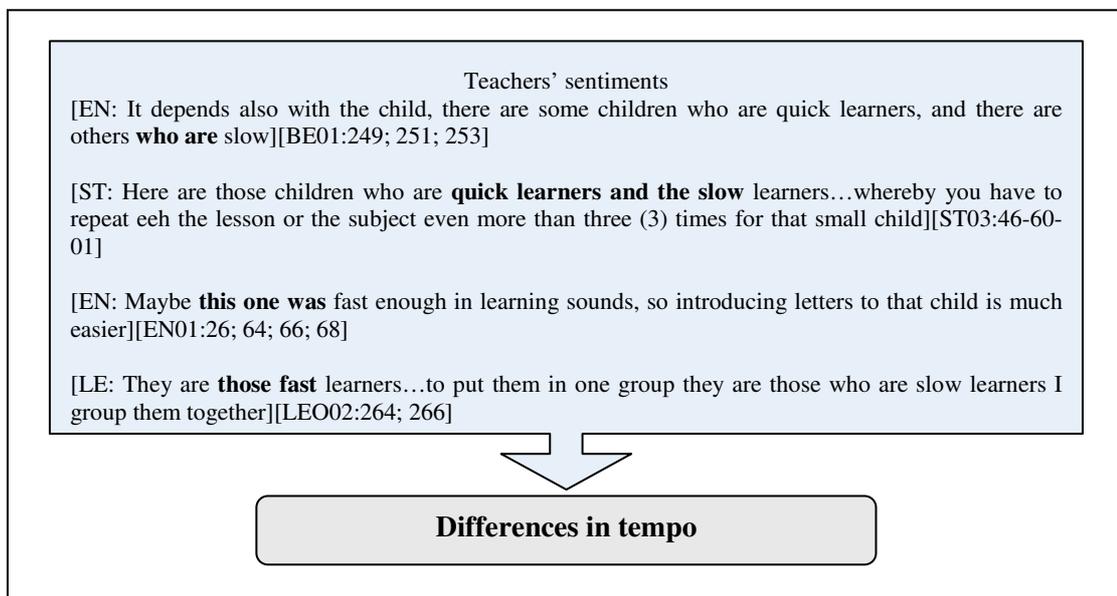


FIGURE 39: Teachers' beliefs about children's tempo

The teachers' comments illustrate how *children's learning tempo* and *cognitive ability* affects their teaching. For example, from the following illustration, Stella's comment suggests that she uses repetition to address the learning needs of children with difficulties. The following sentiments illustrate teachers' beliefs about children's individuality:

[ST: ...there are those children who are quick learners and the slow learners...whereby you have to repeat eeh the lesson or the subject even more than three (3) times for that small child][ST03:46-60-01].

[EN: Therefore, 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][EN01:26; 64; 66; 68]

[BE: It depends also with the child; there are some children, who are quick learners, and there are others who are slow][BE01:249; 251; 253]

[LE: They are those fast learners...to put them in one group, they are those who are slow learners I group them together][LE02:264; 266]

Referring to children participating in choral activities, Enid and Lenora differentiated among children in their learning tempo and approach to learning tasks, while Belinda thinks that when children engage with different activities, she gets time to attend to individual children as their comments suggest:

[EN: ...when I am marking those ones who couldn't stand and go and teach there, that is when you will find I am asking them to read for me this one while I am marking][EN04:114-01]

[EN: ...even when you are introducing something to her you have to go slowly by slowly you are not supposed to force her because if you force her she will get even more confused...][EN02:278; 286]

[LE: I just do not just give them work...I explain, if it is the work of changing from capital letters, changing from Kiswahili to English, I have to explain][LE01 162:02]

[BE: when you give children different [activities]...you get time to attend to each child...maybe you can go round each child telling him or her, what he or she is supposed to do][BE0:386]

However, Lenora's statement that children with learning difficulties learn at the discretion of the teachers, suggests that learning environments in Kenya preschools might not support children with learning differences. She noted:

[LE: The fast learners will catch and they will do their work, and the slow learners, they will not catch because they still need to be attended to, individually][LE01:152-02]

Moreover, the interview requirements tend to impose similarity, rather than tolerate differences in children's ability. Lenora suggested that there was no space for children with learning differences in the system, reiterating her discretion to include learner with difficulties. Stella emphasised the inherent differences among children,

while Belinda would attend to children’s differences in learning tempo, as Enid would do likewise.

Although teachers indicated that they are autonomous in planning for children’s experiences to take into consideration their individuality, they preferred a group approach to an individual one approach, leaving little room for children to express their individuality as illustrated in vignette 6. Group tempo expressed during whole class activities such as when teachers took children through the choral reading activities (individual tempo emerged during free-play, in Belinda’s class). Differentiated tasks emerged when teachers assigned children differential tasks to complete. However, although children’s differentiated copying and task completion assumed a lesser difficulty level, the demand might not have considered children’s ability level from their maturational or developmental perspectives. The teachers’ comments about children’s individuality follow in figure 40 below:

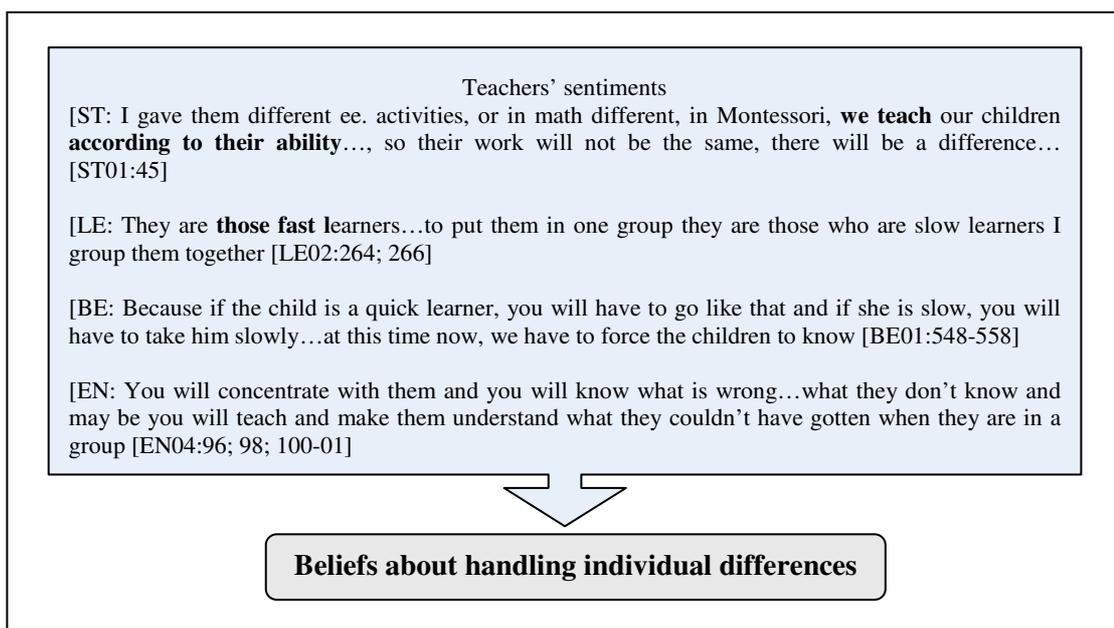


FIGURE 40: Teachers’ beliefs about handling children’s individuality

I observed what appeared to me to be a frustration to the teacher with the children’s differential ability to cope with these tasks correctly. The following vignette (five, below) captures my thoughts in one of Stella’s classes, as I wrote in my journal:

VIGNETTE 5: An illustration of group tempo in learning tasks (Stella's class)

At 9-10, the teacher directs the children to change over to another activity- open to all the children. The activity involves copying letters.

10-11: the children are involved in another activity of individual paper work of math. This activity involves the children completing tasks that the teacher has already copied to their exercise books. I wonder why the teacher does not give them opportunity to write the work by themselves as a way of learning by doing. Clearly, the children are yet to grasp the concepts taught because the teacher is intensely involved with individual children; asking them-sometimes harshly whether they really know what they are doing. Most of the time, the teacher is asking the children to rub the work and start all over again.

My nuances:

In my view the child whom the teacher has just asked to rub all his work and re-do, looks to me to be physically frustrated, from the visible frown on his face. The teacher could be equally frustrated as discerned through her tone of voice. In my view, only a few children have managed to do the work with ease. Otherwise, the activity seems to me, to be well beyond the children's ability because most of them have had to rub the work to re-do or are simply doing the wrong thing. The teachers' tone of voice sounds harsh and frustrated; using such words as "don't you know how to write this? 'Is this how to write it?' "Take the rubber and rub this quickly.

Further vignette 6 (below) illustrates disregard for children's individual tempo and general ability. In addition to the individual differences based on children's variable tempo, Stella perceived social differences among children, which she referred to as 'social privileges'. She remarked:

...if a child maybe comes from let's say around the staff area [University environment] that child can even greet you in English... I have also to express it to the rest, maybe in Kiswahili... and action so that they can understand] [ST02:27-37]

Consequently, Stella expressed belief that children's social and cultural backgrounds, which affect their readiness to learn, should guide teaching. Apart from cultural variations, Stella suggested that children's linguistic readiness also affected their grasp of learning concepts. Emphasizing this difference, she observed that children who come from the rural areas have limited exposure to the English language and so require the use of both verbally propped gestures to simplify their concept attainment. She reiterated her belief in using a more sensitive approach to making learning inclusive for such children. Stella's comments resonate with caution by Klein and Chen (2001:17), that the socioeconomic status of children, which privilege them with certain experiences, invariably affects their interactions and participation in the preschool programme.

However, from the observations illustrated by vignette 5 and 6 below, Lenora, Enid and Stella did not create room to embrace children's individual abilities in the learning process. Their approach contrasts the advice that curriculum activities should consider children's 'transient abilities' (Jalongo *et al.*, 2004:145).

VIGNETTE 6: Tempo of group activities in Enid's class

I arrive slightly late today for my observations, because the taxi [matatu] that I used today stopped midway for about thirty minutes to fill up. As an 'economical' habit that many would-be-in-a-hurry passenger abhors, the taxi has to wait for prospective passengers indefinitely, sometimes to the chagrin of the already late travellers. For us today, fifteen minutes into waiting, the taxi is hardly half-full. Only three more passengers have joined us; eight more to capacity or up to twenty if overloaded. It is only after a few of us start agitating that the taxi moves, albeit grudgingly. It is already half eight, twenty kilometres away and thirty minutes later than scheduled!

I arrive at the school at nine past nine. I dash into class because the teacher is expecting me. As soon as I arrive, she asks the children to go to the toilet, beginning with the boys, followed by the girls. They spent another five minutes in all (mmh, gender sensitive she is!). Meanwhile, the teacher is copying work on the blackboard (Kiswahili), after which she reads aloud with the children, before distributing children's exercise books for a written task where they will draw the word and the pictures. Some of the children have already finished the work, even before the last child gets her book (looks like the children are very much at ease with the activity, there are no signs of struggles). As they complete the exercise, the children bring their books for marking. After that, they go sit, no added work or further instructions, as the other not so fast children complete their task.

Some of them are talking among themselves after completing their work; I can see two boys actually conversing cheek to cheek. At some point, the teacher asks one child to remain behind when the other children go for break because he has sat sideways on his chair (Perhaps depicting impatience), ready to dash for tea! In fact, she tells the child that he will take his tea last, as a punishment! The teacher then asks the rest of the children to suspend their work until they have taken their tea. True to her word, she releases the boy who had wanted to rush for his tea last, to join the others for tea. He is visibly feeling very bad. In fact, he has missed his slices of bread, so he has to wait for the tea girl to bring in more slices.

She then changes over activity to construct words beginning with sounds c, d, f, m, e, n, r, y, j, s, oo, ee, all, ow, ie etc. The children go on with the activity without much ado. They are very comfortable in the activity. However, the children do not seem challenged at all in what they are doing. I think it is more of a routine activity requiring them to recall. The teacher does not explore other levels of the children's abilities, such as creativity

Nuanced...

The teacher makes an effort to correct inappropriate behaviour and as a result, children seem very orderly and disciplined. They obey authority unquestionably. Earlier in the day, the teacher displayed gender sensitivity by asking the children to go to the toilet beginning with the boys, or was it gender discrimination? Well, at another time, she asked a child to clean his nose and to bring an handkerchief the following day; otherwise, she would send him back home if he comes without it. (Although I think sometimes, she is very harsh and uses a terse tone). The children who finished their work early did not receive additional work either, and I think they showed signs of boredom. While others lay their heads on their tables, others conversed in low tones.

5.7.3 CHILDREN'S INDIVIDUALITY: A GENERAL DISCUSSION

As illustrated in the teachers' comments, three broad dimensions of differences define developmentally appropriate classrooms that respond to children's individual differences, namely *interpersonal* rates, *intrapersonal* rates, and *intercultural*

differences. Apart from developmentally related differences, children also display intercultural differences that teachers should respect (Jalongo *et al.*, 2004:144; Klein & Chen, 2001:17). Therefore, teachers ought to be sensitive to various forms of diversity and use them to plan for children's learning activities (Kostelnik *et al.*, 2004:44). However, Stipek (2004:561) suggests that handling differences among children is difficult. The 'whole group' approach used by the teachers in the study reflected the methods used by primary grades observed by Vartuli (1999:505), that first and third grade teachers were less developmentally appropriate than were their head start and kindergarten counterparts.

The theoretical support for children's individuality among teachers did not match their practical approach to embrace individual differences, which include tempo, personality and cultural diversity. The teachers' thinking echoes one of the current developments in early childhood education that advocates an inclusive approach, where all children, regardless of social status, physical ability and economic disadvantage ought to benefit from learning opportunities (Gordon & Browne, 2000:207; Klein & Chen, 2001; Kostelnik *et al.*, 2004:18).

Therefore, since children vary in their cognitive abilities and learning tempo, classrooms ought to be responsive to their individual needs to embrace children's variable intrapersonal and interpersonal abilities and approach to learning tasks (Gordon & Browne, 2000:207; Kostelnik *et al.*, 2004:51). Consequently, each child needs to experience success through individualized goals (Seefeldt & Wasik, 2006:115). Klein and Chen (2001:28) stress that a child will develop optimally when there is a balance between the physical and social environment and their individual abilities and interests.

Conversely, except in a few areas, such as choral reading where children decided whether to lead others, the three teachers' beliefs about children's individuality did not match their practical approach. The need for variable free choice activities to reflect a DAP approach was lacking (Jambunathan & Caulfield, 2006:256; McMullen *et al.*, 2006:87; 2005:454; Miller & Smith, 2004:126). Moreover, despite children's differentiated tasks, faster children set the tempo for learning tasks, while children with a slow tempo struggled to cope or to catch up on their completion tasks. The teachers decided on the duration and content structure of learning, and their beliefs about

children’s individuality contrast with the findings by Wang *et al.* (2008:243), that teachers’ beliefs in their sample were influenced by, *inter alia*, children’s characteristics.

5.7.4 A SUMMARY OF TEACHERS’ BELIEFS ABOUT DAEP

This section addresses the study findings on children’s educational experiences and the emerging teachers’ beliefs on five constructs related to DAEP; teaching strategy, use/silence of materials, scheduling of children’s educational tasks, assessment and the consideration for children’s individuality, in a Montessori and a DICECE preschool. However, the study does not examine the differences inherent to the participants, but rather provides a general perspective of their practical experiences, and the emerging beliefs relating to the DAEP constructs. Figure 41 (below) illustrates a summary of teachers’ beliefs of DAEP.

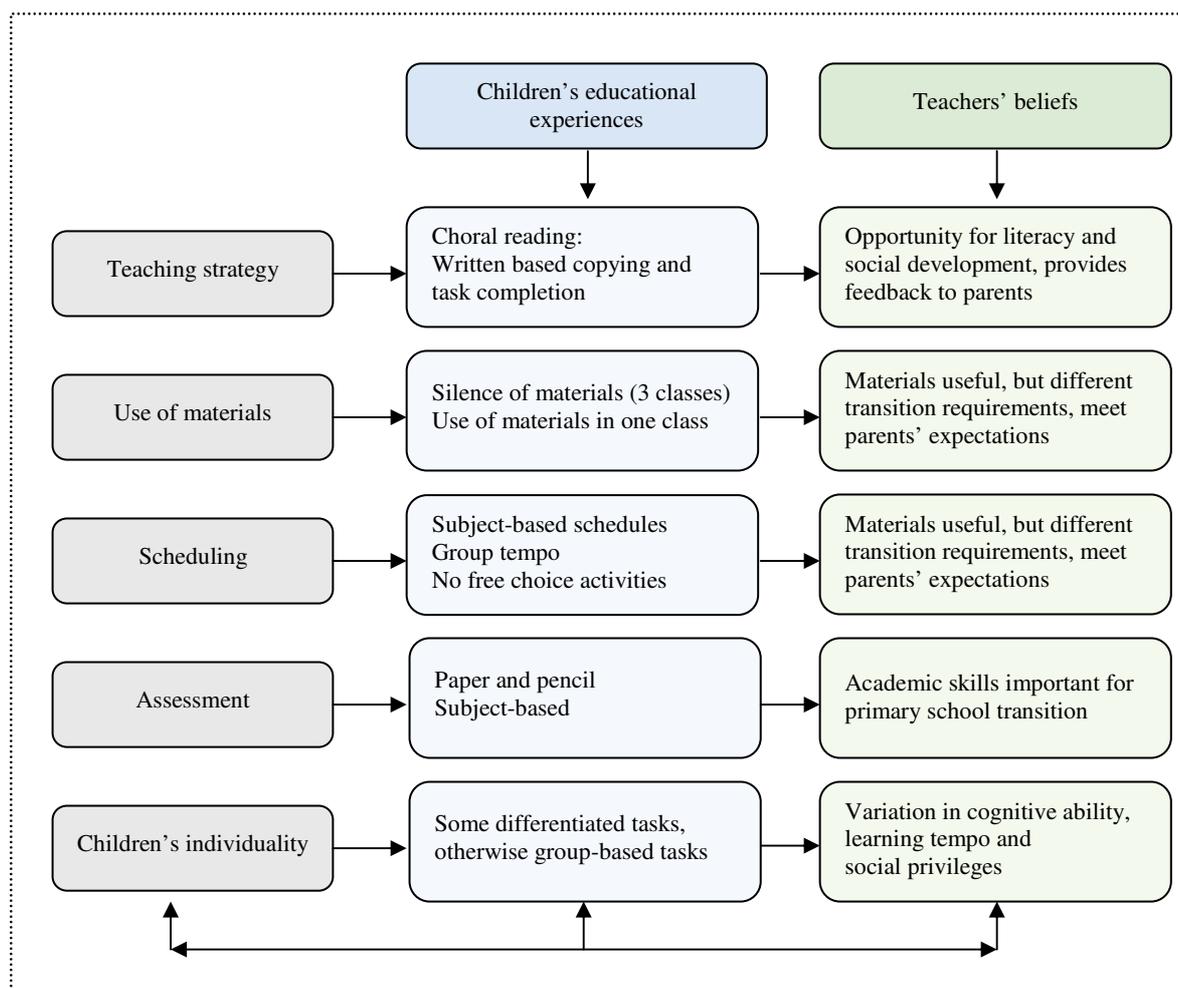


FIGURE 41: A summary of teachers’ beliefs of DAEP

Teachers expressed beliefs consistent with a DAEP approach that supports a child-centred approach to educational experiences. However, their beliefs contrasted their practices, as reflected in children's educational experiences that did not embrace the DAP principles related to children's learning. The teaching strategy embraced teacher-directed approaches focusing on basal skills related to literacy acquisition consistent with the findings of other studies (Jingbo & Elicker, 2005).

The observation that the teachers *silenced the materials* in all the classes except Belinda's class, demonstrates a focus on skills-based academic learning which is in conflict with the DAP template that considers an holistic approach to children's developmental needs which is harnessed through play or manipulation learning materials. Although all the teachers corroborated the usefulness of materials, they believed that there were unique circumstances in their environment that hindered them from using these materials.

Assessment at the preschool is a complicated process, given the children's inability to express themselves in a multiple number of ways. For this reason, a DAEP approach to assessment requires teachers to focus not only on academic skills, but also on other domains of development, which include the assessment of children's social skills, physical and emotional development. However, assessment portrayed in the current study reflected a narrow and skills-based approach, focusing on a paper-and-pencil approach. Even when the teachers talked about the children's physical dexterity, they linked this to children's ability to complete their educational tasks.

The schedules reflected a teacher-directed, subject-based approach (Jingbo & Elicker, 2006:140), in which the pace and content selection in the top classes was similar for all the children. The children with a faster tempo set the pace for the learning activities. Consequently, the teachers held beliefs consistent with children's individual differences, even though they did not seem to embrace practices sensitive to such individuality, except when teachers in the baby classes gave children differentiated copying tasks. Therefore, although teachers subscribed to children's individual differences, their group-based practices negated the principle of diversity, to reflect their strong beliefs, except during differentiated task-completion.

In conclusion, although all teachers held beliefs that reflect a DAP template promoted in early childhood education literature (Republic of Kenya, 2006a; NACECE, 2000; Bredekamp & Copple, 2006; Kostelnik *et al.*, 2004) their practices contradicted their beliefs. Instead, their beliefs were more developmentally appropriate than their practices, due to various factors that might explain the contradictions, as will be discussed in the next chapter. Wang *et al.* (2008:247) demonstrated that, in general, teachers' beliefs could vary according to cultural context, professional training, educational level and the size of the class. It is worth noting that even from these practices that might seem developmentally inappropriate, such as choral reading and task completion, there emerged beliefs that negated this position. For example, the teachers believed that task completion was an important transition requirement for children to fit into the primary school. In the next chapter, I consider some of the influences on teacher beliefs and their practical experiences within a culturally sensitive context of the study.



A brief sojourn after voyage five

As we 'saw' children's educational experiences and 'listened' to the teachers' beliefs on the highway of 'teaching strategy', we saw the children engage in choral reading and written task-based completions. While the rest of the teachers 'silenced' the materials in their classes, children in Belinda's class engaged actively with free play...

Further down the road of 'planning and use of children's time, we saw teachers use a general frameworks and scheduling approach...

And as we turned the bend of 'assessment', we saw and heard teachers use task-based completions and choral reading to assess 'academic skills'...

As we journeyed further down the road, we came across considerations for 'children's individuality' as teachers talked about children's diversity in personality, learning tempo, interest, social and economic background...

However, as we reflect on the past journey, there seems to be discordance between what we saw and heard...

Are there context factors that we might pick on our journey to illuminate our further voyage??? Maybe the next path will lead us into this country's dynamics of preschool teachers' beliefs...

So different, yet so similar to the findings of other sojourners