VOYAGE ONE
A PROPOSAL FOR MY ACADEMIC EXPLORATION STARTS…

R: Hi, it is daybreak…the sun has just woken up…
with it has come for me an opportunity,

To find answers to queries long held, deeply
in the whispers of my mind,

That my heart has always felt and touched,

So disturbingly popping out, but no further than the mind's doorstep…

I propose an academic journey that I want to take….

To a land so far away…planning several voyages…

That, through this journey, these queries may find a way,
to the world of the known,

Unlocking answers, not only to the doorstep
but also to the world at large…

As the journey begins, I will let you know…

1. *What journey am I planning? (Preschool teachers' beliefs of Developmentally Appropriate Educational Practices).*

2. *What made me plan for this journey? (The gaps in research)*

3. *Is the journey worthwhile/ (Justification/ need for the study)*

4. *What do I hope to accomplish when this journey is over?(Objectives of the study)*

5. *And lastly, some direction markers (Definitions)*

Join me now,

So that I can show you that this journey will bring you a different experience,

Through a path, never travelled before, meeting people you have never met,

In contexts that might be so different from your own.

Is it justifiable….come along with me…?

Voyage 1: A proposal for an academic journey starts

1.1   INTRODUCTION

In this section, I provide the rationale for the study, in addition to a background that focuses on the meanings of child-versus teacher-centred approaches to learning. In addition, I focus the study with a brief account on the demand for preschool education before stating the research question and the critical questions guiding the study. Additionally, a brief overview of the methodology and data analysis provides a glimpse of the design used to address the research questions and the subsequent data analysis. I also justify the need for the study, in addition to the context of preschool provision in Kenya to overlay the analysis and interpretation of the study findings. Besides, there is a brief overview of the DAP framework and the bioecological systems theory as the conceptual framework and the theoretical framework respectively, that guide the study. This section concludes with the conceptualised terminology, assumptions of the study and an outline of the entire voyage.

1.2   THE RATIONALE OF THE STUDY

> Children need people in order to become human… [If society neglects children] …we face the prospect of a society which resents its own children and fears its youth (Bronfenbrenner, 1972:663).

Appropriate educational experiences for children in early childhood lay the foundation for their lifelong learning dispositions, besides influencing how they later function in school and beyond (Katz, 1995; National Association for the Education of Young Children, NAEYC, 1997; 2009; Rushton & Larkin, 2001:25; 30, Stipek, 2007; Stipek, Feiler, Daniels & Milburn; 1995). However, despite the teacher being the "essential ingredient in determining the quality of education received by the child" (Kostelnik, Soderman & Whiren, 2004:35), teaching at the preschool[1] has continued to become "unforgivingly complex" (Cochran-Smith in Goldstein, 2007a:51).

Teachers face conflicting demands to meet children's developmental needs, through developmentally appropriate practices[2] (henceforth DAP), while parents and other

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[1]   In this study, a **preschool** refers to the early learning context admitting children between 3-year-old and five-year-old. I use the term interchangeably with **early childhood education and development**.

[2]   DAP principles embrace three pillars in children's education process; the nature of children's development and learning, the strengths, needs and interests of individual children and the social and cultural context of learners (Kostelnik, Soderman & Whiren, 2004:15). As noted, I also use the term 'developmentally appropriate educational

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stakeholders demand that teachers teach children academic skills or standards' requirements[3] (Goldstein, 2007b:382; 396; Maccoby & Lewis, 2003:1074; Miller, 2005:257; Miller & Smith, 2004:123; Morrison, 2006:223, 251; Neuman, 2005:191; Palmer, 2005:26; Warner & Sower, 2005:242; Parker & Neuharth-Pritchett, 2006). Teaching academic skills for school readiness (Seefeldt & Wasik, 2006:35; Neuman & Roskos, 2005:24), also called accountability "shovedown" (Barblett, 2003:27; Hatch, in Goldstein, 2007b:380; Stipek, 2007:741) might complicate teachers' decisions to embrace DAP in their teaching (Geist & Baum, 2005:30; Parker & Neuharth-Pritchett, 2006; Wien in Goldstein, 2007b:380). This is because knowledge of kindergarten teaching and '*standards*' do not fit together seamlessly (Goldstein, 2007b:382; 396). Consequently, *the impact* of these conflicting demands on preschool teachers' beliefs about children's developmentally appropriate educational experiences has introduced complex demands that require further scrutiny.

A DAP framework to childhood education embraces cultural diversity. However, cultures vary in the way they perceive and define childhood. Consequently, these variations inherent in cultural diversity and expectations for early childhood might call for culturally situated research conclusions (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997; Hatch, 2007:1; Kilderry, Nolan & Noble, 2004:26; Klein & Chen, 2001:5; 31; Koops, 2004:13; Robinson & Diaz, 2006; Nutbrown, 2006:25; Pence & Marfo, 2008; Penn, 2000:9; Penn, in Robinson & Diaz, 2006:59; Prochner & Kabiru, 2008; Warner & Sower, 2005:24). Therefore, research (teacher's beliefs) ought to be culturally sensitive to contexts in which children grow and develop, to reflect childcare practices entrenched in social, cultural and historical values of a particular community (Prochner & Kabiru, 2008; Pence & Marfo, 2008; Robinson & Diaz, 2006; Wishard, Shivers, Howes & Ritchie, 2003:96).

Stipek and Byler (1997:319) caution that researchers should embrace community values in their studies, while Jambunathan and Caulfield (2006:252) with Jingo and Elicker (2005:131) conclude that literature on teacher practices in early childhood classrooms in developing countries or various cultures is limited. Complementary studies are necessary

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practices' (DAEP) specifically in my study to stress the educational components; content and process inherent in the DAP framework.

[3] In the study, 'standards' or 'academic skills' or accountability will be used to refer to a focus to meet prescribed external requirements or to teaching subject content areas in preparation for transition to the primary school(such as the interview requirements in Kenya).

to develop an inclusive theoretical understanding of early childhood practices that include literature from the minority world, since much of the current literature in early childhood derives from research done in the west[4] (Pence & Marfo, 2008:81; Smidt, 2007:63).

Therefore, in partly providing context-specific DAP, the current study embraces the bioecological systems theory to explore and describe children's educational experiences and the factors that influence teachers' beliefs and use of DAP, to provide a link between contextual factors and the belief-practice relationship. Through the bioecological systems theory, the study analyses some factors influencing the DAP belief-practice relationship within the social cultural context, in order to contribute further to the DAP belief-practice dialogue. This might provide insight into how teachers decide children's learning experiences in these unexplored contexts, since teachers decide what to implement in their classrooms regardless of what other stakeholders might consider as appropriate practices (Lee, 2006:433). The current study further interrogates this belief-practice dynamics within the bioecological systems in the Kenyan context, to illuminate and complement other studies about teachers' beliefs of developmentally appropriate educational practices in their work experiences.

Goldstein (2008:257) concludes that:

> …there is no single correct response to the question of what curriculum content or which instructional practices are developmentally appropriate for an individual child, a certain classroom full of students, a particular school setting, or a specific socio-cultural context; every question has many possible answers.

As Goldstein (2008) acknowledges, there could be many divergent voices on DAP, which not only call for diverse social and cultural responses, but which might also complicate teacher decisions about children's educational experiences. Hence, the current study seeks some possible answers among the many, about teachers' beliefs of developmentally appropriate practices.

In addition, the study explores teachers' beliefs about observed[5] preschool children's educational experiences in a Montessori and an eclectic preschool system (henceforth

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4   Studies done in western oriented countries of the world
5   This study was carried out in two sites: a Montessori preschool and a preschool (DICECE) which embraces a locally designed early childhood curriculum.

Voyage 1: A proposal for an academic journey starts

DICECE) respectively, in a developing country namely Kenya. This is because there seems to be lack of consensus about what children should be taught, or how standards should be implemented (Wien, in Goldstein, 2007b:380; Stipek, 2004:550). Although the study does not explicitly compare both Montessori-trained and eclectically trained teachers in their beliefs and practices, it provides data that makes this comparison possible.

At the methodological level, most studies have tended to use self-reported beliefs (Kowalski, Pretti-Frontczak & Johnson, 2001; McMullen & Alat, 2002; McMullen, Elicker, Wang, Erdiller, Lee, Lin & Sun, 2005; McMullen, Elicker, Goetze, Huang, Lee, Mathers, Wen & Yang, 2006), which might be limited in capturing the teachers actual beliefs, because teachers tend to express "conventional wisdom" (Hyson, in McMullen, 1999). There are links between teachers' beliefs and their practices demonstrated in previous research[6] (Kim, Kim & Maslak, 2005:443; Maxwell *et al.*, 2001:443; McMullen *et al.*, 2005:461; Phillips, 2004; Stipek & Byler, 1997:318; Vartuli, 1999:507; Wang, Elicker, McMullen & Mao, 2008:243). However, some of these studies were largely quantitative (e.g. Cassidy & Lawrence, 2000; Kim *et al.*, 2005; Stipek & Byler, 1997), while some established a lack of correspondence between beliefs and practices (e.g. Cassidy & Lawrence, 2000; Foote, Smith & Ellis, 2004; Zeng & Zeng, 2005; Winsler & Carlton, 2003).

Beliefs are entrenched in a person's repertoire of experience. Therefore, although quantitative studies are generalizable, self-reports might be limited in capturing beliefs (Kuhn, in Lee, 2006:434; Stipek, 2004:561). Besides, studies that use classroom observation other than teachers' self-reports about their practices might be few (Stipek, 2004:561; Vartuli, 1999:507; Zeng & Zeng, 2005:718), highlighting a limitation because "teachers tell you what you want to hear" (Vartuli, 1999:508). To counter the limitations of self-reported beliefs, this study used video and photo-elicitation to capture the teachers' beliefs inherent in their practices. This approach provided the teachers with an opportunity to express themselves, as they also chose the photographs or video to view and discuss. Therefore, beliefs elicited through observations that concretize teachers and children's educational experiences are necessary in contextualising the belief-practice relationship.

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[6]   A detailed literature review follows in the next voyage.

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It also appears that because teachers' beliefs might determine children's educational experiences, there is a need to interrogate aspects of the belief-practice domain so as to contribute literature that includes various constructs related to the DAP template. Most studies have tended to group beliefs as generally appropriate or inappropriate (Snider & Fu, in Lee & Ginsburg, 2007:4), or have used broad theories such as maturationist, behaviourist or interactionist (Caruso *et al.*, in Lee & Ginsburg, 2007:4), or child-oriented versus skills oriented (Stipek & Byler, 1997). Previous studies also locate beliefs as either child-centred or teacher-directed, in relation to teacher beliefs or DAP (Cassidy & Lawrence, 2000; McMullen *et al.*, 2006; 2005; Vartuli, 1999; Stipek, 2004; Jambunathan & Caulfield, 2006; Zeng & Zeng, 2005). This study will rather seek appropriate beliefs according to the DAP principles, even within teacher-directed approaches, including experiences that might appear to be developmentally inappropriate practices (henceforth DIP).

In this study, the constructs pursued include beliefs that relate to the teachers' teaching strategy, their use of materials, scheduling, assessment and interpretation of children's individuality. By including these five constructs at the same time as a framework for analysis, the study not only provides a deeper understanding of them, but also provides an holistic perspective of how these DAP constructs relate to each other and to teachers' beliefs in a single study. This way one can access both 'children's and teachers' real experiences during the teaching and learning process (Jingbo & Elicker, 2005:131) as it includes both *content* [what] and *process* [how] of teaching and learning. In addition, the study explores factors that influence teachers' use of developmentally appropriate practices (Parker & Neuharth- Pritchett, 2006).

In summary, *methodological* (video and photo-elicitation), and *conceptual* (five constructs related to DAP: teaching strategy, use of learning materials, scheduling, assessment and children's individuality), are brought together in a single study. It also considers DAP *within a continuum,* rather than either/or, and *context specific* [Montessori and DICECE] *cultural rationales* are significant so that this study might contribute to early childhood education literature. In the following section I provide a preview of child-centred versus teacher-directed learning and how each relates to the principles of DAP.

1.3   A GENERAL BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

The terms attached to early childhood go beyond mere labels: they imply different purposes, pedagogical practices and forms of delivery, not to mention the varying social and economic status of the personnel involve (UNESCO, 2002:1).

1.3.1   CHILD-CENTRED VERSUS TEACHER-DIRECTED LEARNING

There continues to be a debate as to whether teacher-directed or child-centred might be appropriate for effective learning and holistic development in kindergarteners (Stipek *et al.*, 1995:209). Although early educators might use both approaches, there seems to be a strong recommendation for child-centred approaches to child development that might be holistic. Child-centred approaches developed from theoretical and empirical research on constructivist learning, while teacher-directed approaches align with behaviourist approaches. A blend of both approaches might involve understanding the nature of the child from within many theoretical paradigms, such as constructivist, behaviourist, maturational and social-cultural, to synthesize "genetic potential, past development, and current environmental circumstance" to explain development (Sroufe, Cooper & DeHart, 1996:8).

Sugrue (1997:6) consolidates definitions used for child-centred approaches, also known as 'progressive' teaching, to offer a wide-ranging terminology.   These includes 'developmental', 'craftsman teaching', 'informal teaching' and 'process teaching', to distinguish child-centred approaches. DAP or child-centred approaches recognize the need for children to engage actively with their learning environment so that they develop cognitive, social, emotional and physical functioning (Burke & Burke, 2005:282; Cassidy, 2005:144; Geist & Baum, 2005:28; Goldstein, 2007b:378; Klein & Chen, 2001:31; Kostelnik *et al.*, 2004:18; Neuman & Roskos, 2005:25; Rushton & Larkin, 2001:26-8; Stipek, 2007). Therefore, as a guide for appropriate practices that develop the whole child, DAP embraces many principles of a child-centred approach to learning (Stipek, 1993:30).

DAP is an ideal, historically and philosophically entrenched approach to Kindergarten learning, derived from years of research into the unique nature of each child's way of learning (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997; Goldstein, 2007b:380; Gordon & Browne,

2000:207; Kostelnik *et al.*, 2004:51; NAEYC, 1997; 2009), rooted in the relationship between neurological research and learning (Rushton & Larkin, 2001:32). In addition, cultural diversity invariably influences children's approach to learning tasks (Jalongo *et al.*, 2004:144; Klein & Chen, 2001:17). Paciorek and Munroe, in Kostelnik *et al.* (2004:14) relate good practices to DAP, noting that:

> Good practice is teachers in action: teachers busy, holding conversations, guiding activities, questioning children, challenging children's thinking, observing, drawing conclusions, and planning and monitoring activities throughout the day.

A DAP principles approach considers age appropriateness, individual appropriateness, and cultural appropriateness in the way children learn (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997; Charlesworth, Hart, Burts & DeWolf, 1993:12-3; Charlesworth, 1998; Ludlow & Berkeley in Jalongo *et al.*, 2004:144; Kostelnik *et al.*, 2004:16-7; Philips, in Klein & Chen, 2001:31; NAEYC, 1997; 2009).

In contrast, teacher-directed approaches, also sometimes called DIP, are usually associated with 'traditional teaching' (Parker & Neuharth-Pritchett, 2006). These are also referred to as 'didactism', 'transmission', 'telling', 'teacher-centred', 'rigid', 'uniform', 'narrow' and 'content-driven' (Bullough, Samuelowicz & Bain, in Sugrue, 1997:5). Skills teaching appear to support the acquisition of certain abilities, such as letter recognition and reading achievement, besides giving a possible head start to children from low-income backgrounds (Adams & Engelmann; Engelmann both in Stipek, 2004:551; Stipek *et al.*, 1995; Stipek, in Neuharth-Pritchett, 2006).

Kindergarten teachers can plan for teacher-directed, child-centred or a nested approach that blends both approaches (Stipek, 1993). Through the latter approach, children engage meaningfully in their learning, as the teacher also deliberately teaches basic academics or standards skills necessary for school readiness (Goldstein, 2007b:378-379; Seefeldt & Wasik, 2006:32-5). Blending both academic skills teaching and child-centred learning/DAP might not be easy, owing to several factors that influence the use of DAP. These include teachers' personality factors, such as their self-efficacy, locus of control, trait anxiety (McMullen, 1999), educational and professional experience (McMullen & Alat, 2002; McMullen, 1999), and external pressure for academic skills (Dunn & Kontos, in Rushton & Larkin, 2001:25; Geist & Baum, 2005:29; Goldstein, 2007b:379; Seefeldt & Wasik, 2006:43). Besides, the interpretation of DAP as either present or

absent, rather than existing in a continuum (Charlesworth *et al.*, 1993; Kontos & Dunn, 1993: Kostelnik *et al.*, 2004:33-9; Parker & Neuharth, 2006), might have introduced the rival dichotomous approaches to early childhood education, placing teachers on the 'horns of a dilemma' (Katz quoted by Wien, in Goldstein, 2007a:41). Stipek *et al.*, (1995:220) suggest "appropriate early childhood education be framed in less black-and-white terms than is often framed in the literature". Such framing might allow blending of academic skills with children's play.

In conclusion, whether teachers use child-centred approaches or teacher-directed appear to influence children's development and acquisition of academic skills. While child-centred approaches support children's holistic development that include physical, social, emotional, and higher order cognitive development, teacher-directed approaches that do not allow children to engage in the process of learning, might compromise some domains of child development. Regardless, teacher-directed approaches are valuable for children to develop reading competence. Therefore, a balance of both child-centred and teacher-directed practices might facilitate children's holistic development as well as equipping them with academic skills for later school success. Such practices would be located on a continuum of DAP from highly DAP, to less DAP. The following section is a discussion of the demand for academic skills competence as a requirement that might require teacher-directed approaches. Figure 1 illustrates the meeting point between teacher-directed and child-centred approaches to result in DAEP.
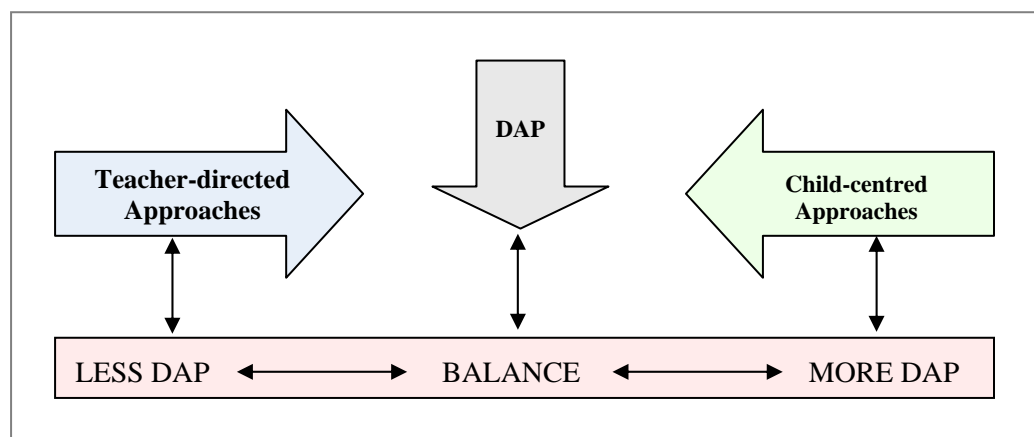
FIGURE 1: **Relating DAP to teaching approach**

1.3.2   DEMAND FOR ACADEMIC SKILLS COMPETENCE

Many nations now demand accountability in early childhood, especially as an equity strategy that brings all children with diverse social backgrounds on a par with each other (Republic of Kenya, 2006b; Republic of Kenya, 2005; NAEYC, 1997; 2009). This demand appears to be motivated by a 'head start' philosophy or the 'early advantage theory' (Mwaura *et al*., 2008:238; Robinson & Diaz, 2008:51). Although the movement *head start* originated in the USA, with NCLB policy[7] (NAEYC, 2009:3), many states of the world appear to have embraced this push for an early start to academic excellence. Miller (2005) cites the example of England, Cassidy (2005) cites the Scottish example, Jambunathan and Caulfield (2006) that of India. Biersteker *et al.* cite the example of Kenya, Wang *et al.* (2008) give examples from China, Yoo (2005) gives examples from Korea, and Barblett (2003) cites the Australian case.

As already noted, the demand for academic skill competence for children has implication for the teaching approach that teachers use. The concern for accountability measures invariably affects how and what teachers plan as children's educational experiences (DiBello & Neuharth-Pritchett, 2008). As mentioned above, the push for academic skills that might require teacher-directed approaches, appears to contradict the principles of DAP (Goldstein, 2007a:41; Maccoby & Lewis, 2003:1074; McMullen, 1999; Miller, 2005:257; Miller & Smith, 2004:123; Miller, 2005:258; Morrison, 2006:223, 251; Neumann, 2005:191; Palmer, 2005:26; Parker & Neuharth-Pritchett, 2006; Stipek *et al.*, 1995:209; Warner & Sower, 2005:242). DAP incorporates many dimensions of the child-centered approach (Henson, 2003:6; Stipek, 1993:32; Sugrue, 1997:6-8).

As a result, children in teacher-directed classes in contrast with those in child-centred preschools have limited opportunities to construct their own learning (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997; Kostelnik, 2004; Montessori, 1920; Stipek, 2007; 1993:30; Vygotsky, 1978). In addition, they might not develop higher order thinking (Stipek, 1993; Stipek *et al.*, 1995; Stipek, 2007), have less motivation to learn (Katz, in Stipek, 1993), or may develop dependency on adult authority (Elkind, in Stipek, 1993). They might also experience social and emotional problems because they get limited opportunities to interact with peers as requisite to their social and emotional skills development

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[7]   Head start is a project in the USA, meant to uplift the educational achievement of children from low income communities to compete favourably through school.

(Charlesworth *et al.*, 1993; Stipek *et al.*, 1995). In view of Montessori's (1920:14-5) caution, teacher-directed approaches that inhibit the child's freedom of movement are analogous to 'butterflies pinned to the desk', rendering their wings useless. Burke and Burke (2005:282) conclude that an academic focus on children "short-changes other aspects of development".

Acknowledging the complexity of teacher-decisions in the face of many factors, Kostelnik *et al.* (2004:34) note "the reality is that teaching is complex; no single solution fits every circumstance". Given this complexity, Goldstein (2007a:42) concludes that "there are many teachers struggling to find ways to manage the DAP versus the standards dilemma in their daily practices". Klein and Chen (2001:31) warn that "DAP is extremely complicated" because of the variable nature of children in the programme, and they caution that parents' expectations might also vary, even within the same programme. Consequently, preschool teachers[8] might find it difficult to get a workable solution to balance between the conflicting demands (Adams & Swadener, 2000:400; Goldstein, 2007b:380; Geist & Baum, 2005:29), because the ideal conditions to strike a balance in a continuum might be complicated. For example, an academic skills approach might require whole group, predetermined activities, while a DAP approach might involve individualised activities in which children learn at their own pace. Grisham-Brown *et al.* (2005:21) note that there is lack of consensus on how developmentally appropriate practices should be implemented, which seems to accommodate the complexity. Nutbrown pushes the debate further into variable social contexts thus:

> Herein lies the questions for research. How can educators know what should be learnt? How are the decisions about what to teach next taken...? Of course views on development and what constitutes appropriate development is always contestable (2006:25).

In line with cultural diversity, more recently the recommendation for early childhood teachers to embrace a culturally sensitive approach to the use of DAP has come to the fore (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997; NAEYC, 1997; NAEYC, 2009). Bredekamp (in Goldstein, 2008:255) identify cultural context dynamics such as parents' preferences, community values, societal expectations, and educational requirements of the succeeding levels as some of the factors that a culturally-sensitive DAP ought to embrace. It appears

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[8]   In this study I use preschool teacher to reflect the name commonly used in the context of the study to refer to early childhood teachers (read Kindergarten teachers/early childhood educators) of children between ages three and five years.

from the recommendation that the value system of a community ought to guide early childhood educators (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997; Kostelnik *et al.*, 2004). Goldstein (2008) complicates the DAP cultural matrix by introducing a "politically appropriate" dimension to early childhood practices. This appears to introduce complex factors that entwine to affect teachers' use of DAP (Adams & Swadener, 2000:400; Geist & Baum, 2005:29; Goldstein, 2007b:380; 2008; Klein & Chen, 2001:31; Kostelnik *et al.*, 2004:34; Parker & Neuharth-Pritchett, 2006).

Given the matrix of DAP to embrace multiple levels of 'appropriateness' at three levels; child characteristics and the nature of the learning environment, cultural sensitivity, as well as political appropriateness, DAP becomes even more intricate. The DAP matrix increases in complexity where the cultural composition is as diverse as 43 tribal groupings in Kenya, who might not share similar values. This is because the responsibilities for and of children and childhood, besides the general policies guiding the provision of ECE, plus cultural expectations, tend to vary from one context to another (Klein & Chen, 2001:31; Koops, 2004:13; Nutbrown, 2006:25; Penn, 2000:9; Penn, in Robinson & Diaz, 2006:59; Warner & Sower, 2005:24). Concerning the changing landscape of expectations of early childhood, and its relationship with DAP, Hatch concludes:

> the experience of being a child in the post-modern era is very different…accountability concerns have been pushed down into the early years schooling forcing everyone to reconsider what accounts as appropriate early childhood education (2007:1).

Faced with such challenges, teachers draw from their personal experiences and knowledge to decide on appropriate children's learning experiences (Foote *et al.*, 2004:136; Gordon & Browne, 2000:196; Klein & Chen, 2001:40; Lin, Lawrence & Gorrell, 2003:227; Lortie, 2002; Wang, *et al*., 2008:243, 246). Moreover, the quality of teachers' interactions might reflect their convictions of how children learn best (Jingbo & Elicker, 2005:131). Therefore, no matter what the theories of development, policy documents or curriculum initiatives that exist to guide early childhood education, teachers determine what to implement in their classrooms (Lee & Ginsburg, 2008:3; Lee, 2006:433).

Significant to teachers' decisions about children's educational experiences, are their beliefs (Kowalski, Brown & Pretti-Frontczak, 2005:24; Lee & Ginsburg, 2007:4; Maxwell, McWilliams, Hemmeter, Ault & Schuster, 2001:434; Wang *et al.*, 2008:228; Wilcox-Herzog & Ward, 2004). However, beliefs override knowledge, while acting as screens for sieving personal experience and action (Lortie, 2002). Consequently, beliefs are likely to influence teachers' objectives (Lee, 2006:433; McMullen & Alat, 2002) for the teaching-learning partnerships (Brownlee & Berthelsen, 2006:24).

Because of the value of beliefs in predicting decisions, it appears reasonable to explore further the belief-practice domain to understand the social and cultural dynamics inherent in preschool children's educational experiences. Beliefs are socially constructed and mainly rooted in culture, (Hayden & Penn both cited in McMullen *et al.*, 2005:452), and in personal experiences of teachers (Brownlee & Berthelsen, 2006:19; Schoonmaker & Ryan; Katz both in Cassidy & Lawrence, 2000:193). Therefore, variations in beliefs inherent in cultural differences and personal experiences might be expected (Wang *et al.*, 2008:228). Samuelsson (2006:115) captures contextual variations in defining childhood and children as "the way a society thinks about its children affects its opinions about their capabilities and skills". Robinson and Diaz (2006:6) eloquently frame this new dispensation: "there has been an increased awareness of the need to view child development within different social, cultural, political contexts of childhood". Penn argues further that:

> …Since each country and sub-group within it may represent a rather radically different view point or set of expectations towards what children are…do or should not do…such world views accounts of childhood and culture cannot be simply compared (2000:9).

From the preceding discussion, I make the following conclusions; first, teachers are increasing facing demands that contradict DAP (read best practices, principles of child development), the basis upon which they are trained. Second, the definition of childhood and the expectations for children is not only culturally diverse, but also intra-culturally varied. Third, personal experiences reinforce beliefs and behaviour. Contradictory demands, a culturally situated childhood and beliefs are all significant in understanding how preschool teachers' beliefs frame their understanding and interpretation of DAP. In the following section, I state and elaborate on the purpose of my study.

1.4 THE PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH

The purpose of my research is to explore the way preschool teachers' practical experiences frame their beliefs and interpretation of developmentally appropriate educational practices in the face of conflicting demands that require them to remain DAP, while facing what I call highly 'academised' expectations of preschools in Kenya. This might enhance an understanding of the continuum of DAP beliefs and practices involved in children's educational experiences within five constructs related to DAP; teaching strategy, use of materials, scheduling, assessment and providing for children's individual differences. In addition, the study provides insight into the current role that the preschool environment plays in the child's educational experiences in Kenya.

1.4.1 THE MAIN RESEARCH QUESTION

Against this background, the main research question is posed as: How do preschool teachers' practical experiences frame their beliefs, understanding, and interpretation of developmentally appropriate educational practices?

1.4.2 CRITICAL QUESTIONS GUIDING THE STUDY

The following critical questions are also posed:

1. How do preschool teachers interpret developmentally appropriate educational practices?

2. How does preschool teachers' interpretation of DAEP express itself in their interaction with children?

3. What are the beliefs underlying teachers perception and interpretation of DAEP?

4. What are some of the factors influencing such beliefs?

1.5 METHODOLOGY AND DATA ANALYSIS OVERVIEW

The constructivist paradigm in which it is believed the actors in the social world socially construct experiences guides this study. Therefore, teachers as participants, and I as the researcher, were capable of using our individual and collective experiences to create an understanding about children's educational experiences and the teachers' beliefs about

DAP, viewed through our social and cultural lenses, to explain such experiences. Visually recorded observations and interviews[9] were the tools of data generation.

The participants in the study were four female teachers, three certified under the Montessori system and one trained as a DICECE teacher. I explored, using video and photographs, four- and five-year-old children's educational experiences in two separate settings, using a case study design. I then used the video and photographs as visual elicitation tools to explore teachers' emerging beliefs.

The data was first analysed[10] deductively, through a bottom-up approach that generated themes on children's educational experiences and teachers' beliefs. The themes derived from children's educational experiences became the basis of subsequent analysis of teachers' beliefs according to the five thematic constructs related to DAP: teaching strategy, use of teaching materials, scheduling, assessment and consideration for children's individuality. These constructs also provide structure to the data presented.

1.6   SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The study contributes to the increasing need for research that locates DAP in a social and political context where children grow and develop. The adoption of the Bioecological systems theory to understand the dynamics of teachers' beliefs of developmentally appropriate educational practices in Kenya contributes to such a need. This study provides:

- insight into the factors that influence teachers' beliefs and their use of developmentally appropriate practices. This knowledge is necessary to inform early education policy and to improve preschool provision in Kenya.

- as part of a relatively new approach to access teachers' beliefs, some insights into and challenges on a methodological level with regards to the use of visual elicitation.

- insight into the nature of children's educational content and processes, and in turn areas on which teachers focus the children's educational experiences.

In the following section, I preview preschool education provision in Kenya.

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9   See voyage three for a detailed discussion of the paradigm and methodology used in the study.
10   For a detailed approach to data analysis, refer to voyage four.

1.7   EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION IN KENYA

A brief background of ECE in Kenya provides insight to the social and cultural dynamics in the study. In comparison to other sub-Saharan countries, Kenya has a well-established system of early education and care (Adams & Swadener, 2000:387), with a remarkable increase in provision over the years since independence (Biersteker *et al.*, 2008:232). In Kenya, early childhood development and education[11], henceforth ECDE, is a broad term used to encompass the various early childhood care services, such as play group (six-months to two-years), baby class (three-year-olds), pre-primary-one (four-year-olds) and pre-primary-two (five-year-olds) (Republic of Kenya, 2005:2). An earlier policy guideline by the Nation Centre for Early childhood Education (NACECE), a body which also co-ordinates ECE provision services, defined early childhood development centres as contexts where a 0-6 year children's total needs; such as care, love, education socialization, health and nutrition, are met (NACECE, 1999:20).

The standard guidelines for preschool education in Kenya recommend child-centred methods for children to enjoy their learning (Republic of Kenya, 2006a:2). However, one contentious issue facing some preschool children in Kenya today, especially in urban centres, is an increasing focus on academic skills (Adams & Swadener, 2000:394; Mbugua, 2004:196; Mwaura *et al.*, 2008:238; Prochner & Kabiru, 2008:126). Part of the focus on academic skills includes holiday tuition, even for preschool children (Waithaka, 2006). Although there seems to be no research to indicate the extent of bias for teachers to focus on academic skills, a study by Ng'asike (2004) might suggest that the problem exists and could be spreading. Therefore, the current study is in part an effort to explore children's educational experiences.

In Kenya, the guidelines for ECE set out the following objectives as stipulated in the early childhood development guidelines. These guidelines closely relate to principles guiding DAP, which include emphasis on individualized learning and home-school partnerships (Republic of Kenya, 2006a:1-2). According to the document developed by NACECE (1999:V), the general objectives of ECD programme include principles that emphasize an holistic approach to child development. These include children's ability to learn through play, to develop confidence to approach learning tasks and to enhance their

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[11]   There is more context information in the second voyage.

creativity. In addition, it encourages practices that promote children's self-awareness and cultural appreciation, as they build good habits and values as members of a group. Additionally, practices that help children develop moral values and to improve their health and nutritional status are encouraged. Lastly, the document outlines skills to develop in children as part of equipping them to cope with primary school life.

1.8   THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF THE STUDY

The document on guidelines for preschool education in Kenya does not explicitly mention DAP. However, a synthesis of the guidelines to preschool education underscore four dimensions (physical, cognitive, emotional and social) developed through exploration and active manipulation of the environment through play that relate to the holistic DAP template. This study will adopt the DAP principles and the bioecological systems theory to provide a lens through which the data is generated, analysed and interpreted. The DAP principles framework is chosen for four reasons: Firstly, the development of the DAP principles has been informed by theory of, and research into childhood development and learning. This is a synthesized document, which relates early childhood development and research to children's learning and development through best practices. Therefore, since Montessori and other training colleges might base their teacher training on the theories of child development and learning, these DAP principles, although originating from the USA, provide a platform to examine the way teachers' beliefs and practices in Kenya relate to the principles of child development. Secondly, an examination of the DAP principles and the Kenyan standards' guideline for early childhood development have a close correspondence

Thirdly, the Kenyan government had developed its early childhood curriculum in conjunction with international partners, such as the World Bank, the Bernard-Van-Leer Foundation, and the Aga Khan Foundation. The curriculum was preceded by workshops organised in conjunction with USA early childhood experts (Adams & Swadener, 2000; Swadener & Mutua, 2008). These collaborations might have influenced the content of the early childhood curriculum development.

Fourthly, the DAP principles have had a significant impact on the early childhood practices internationally, having crossed its original American borders through conferences, workshops and various publications (McMullen *et al.*, 2005:453). Pence

and Marfo (2008:80), as well as Prochner and Kabiru (2008:126), quoting other scholars as Gakuru, Hyde and Kabiru, and Myers, conclude that western models guided most preschool curricula in African countries.

Therefore, as mentioned above, apart from the close correspondence between the standard guidelines for preschool education in Kenya and principles of DAP guiding the study, Pence and Marfo (2008:80) together with Smidt (2007:63) conclude that ideas and research from the West continue to influence preschool education in many parts of Africa and other parts of the world. Swadener *et al.*, (2008:414) agree that the preschool standards template in Kenya has a mix of both local and a global template, comprising "Western, assumptions about child development…[that] permeate Kenyan early childhood guidelines and training…because the Kenyan *Guidelines for Preschool Education* (Kenya Institute of Education 2000) were based on earlier United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) documents". Adams and Swadener (2000:386) both American-based professors, acknowledge their input to the development of early childhood education (in its formative years) in Kenya. Swadener elaborates further on her input to early childhood research in Kenya (Swadener & Mutua, 2008:35). The ECE guidelines in Kenya as already outlined, has traces of DAP, which might reflect the effect of such collaborations. This is the reason I seek to explore teachers' beliefs of DAP as reflected in the children's educational experiences. I could have used the NACECE[12] guidelines (mainly used by DICECE teachers), but my interest with a Montessori preschool[13] motivated the choice of the DAP framework, whose theoretical and conceptual grounding in child development theory and learning might be inclusive of both systems of teaching. The following section I give a brief overview of the bioecological systems theory before clarifying the terms used in the study.

1.9   THE BIOECOLOGICAL SYSTEMS THEORY

The bioecological theory advanced by Bronfenbrenner and Morris (in Bronfenbrenner, 2005), proposes that an individual develops in the course of a lifespan within a context that is affecting and is being affected by the individual. The assumption of this theory is that child development takes place within an ecological set of four interacting systems,

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[12]   The document originates from NACECE, so it is assumed that it guides the practices of preschool teachers who train under NACECE/DICECE.
[13]   Montessori teachers, assumed to be trained to reflect the international Montessori Methods curriculum might vary in their philosophy of child development.

namely the microsystem, the mesosytem, the exosystem and the macrosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1972; 1979; 2000; 2005). These systems are organised in a spherical order around the child, beginning with the microsystem, as immediate, to the most peripheral macrosystem.

In this study, the bioecological theory's proposal of locating people within interpersonal structures and roles as contexts for the child's development is valuable. In particular, the concept of a dyad, formed whenever two persons pay attention or participate in one another's activity is significant (Bronfenbrenner, 1979:56). Three levels of engagement are possible in dyads; firstly, the observational dyad occurs when one member pays close and sustained attention to the activity of the other, showing some level of acknowledgement. Observational learning results from this dyad. Such learning is reinforced especially when the interacting party makes an overt reference to the attention displayed. Secondly, the ecological systems theory proposes that a joint activity between dyads evolves from the observational dyad (Bronfenbrenner, 1979:56). At this engagement level, the two interacting partners are engaged in an activity which may not necessarily be the same but similar, sometimes just being part of a whole. Herein rests the power of reciprocity as a significant basis for further sustained learning (Bronfenbrenner, 1979:57). He suggested an existence of differential power status, with the developing individual possessing less power than the knowledgeable person does. Consequently, for optimal learning to take place, the developing child individual should be allowed space for independence as he/she gradually takes over responsibility for present as well as future learning (Bronfenbrenner, 1979:58). In the course of a joint activity dyad, feelings that could be mutually positive, negative, ambivalent or asymmetrical could develop. The third type of dyad is the primary dyad. According to Bronfenbrenner (1979:58), this dyadic relationship only exists conceptually, even when the two parties are not physically together. This type of relationship motivates development in the absence or presence of the influencing party.

Bronfenbrenner (1979:85) also suggest that roles as contexts of development define how individuals play different roles in society to define their social positions and the subsequent role expectations. Accordingly, he defined a role as a "set of activities and relations expected of a person occupying a particular position in society and of others in relation to that person (Bronfenbrenner, 1979:85). Therefore, according to this definition

and principles outlined by Bronfenbrenner in relation to the dyads, a preschool teacher is in a reciprocally dynamic relationship with others in the social system in relation to their role as teachers. Such others include children, parents, the directors of schools and curriculum developers. Within the framework of such divergent role expectations, the preschool teacher is expected to satisfy all expected roles. Likewise, the teacher expects the others associated with her/him in relation to her/his role to reciprocate in their respective roles.

Using this theory to understand the dynamics of children's educational experiences and teachers' beliefs, I conceptualise preschool education within the four components of the bioecological systems. These various systems each have components and effects on ECE provision. The child and the teacher are each situated in the microsystem, but at different levels. Moreover, I situate teachers' beliefs as being affected by the microsystem (individual experiential level), the exosystem (as in the case of training and interaction with colleagues) that affect children's educational experiences and teachers' beliefs as experiences located in the microsystem, but which have factors located in the other systems affecting them. Within the dynamics of the bioecological theory, teachers too have roles to play with regards to the children's educational experiences, which are intricately linked to the entire social, cultural and political spectrum of school provision. Although the bioecological theory might suggest various levels of development with focus on the child, I extend development in the various systems located in the bioecological systems theory to include influence on parents, teachers and other stakeholders in preschool provision. The dynamics of the interplay between the bioecological systems components and the provision of ECE in Kenya is discussed in voyage seven. Figure 2 below illustrates the components of the bioecological theory.
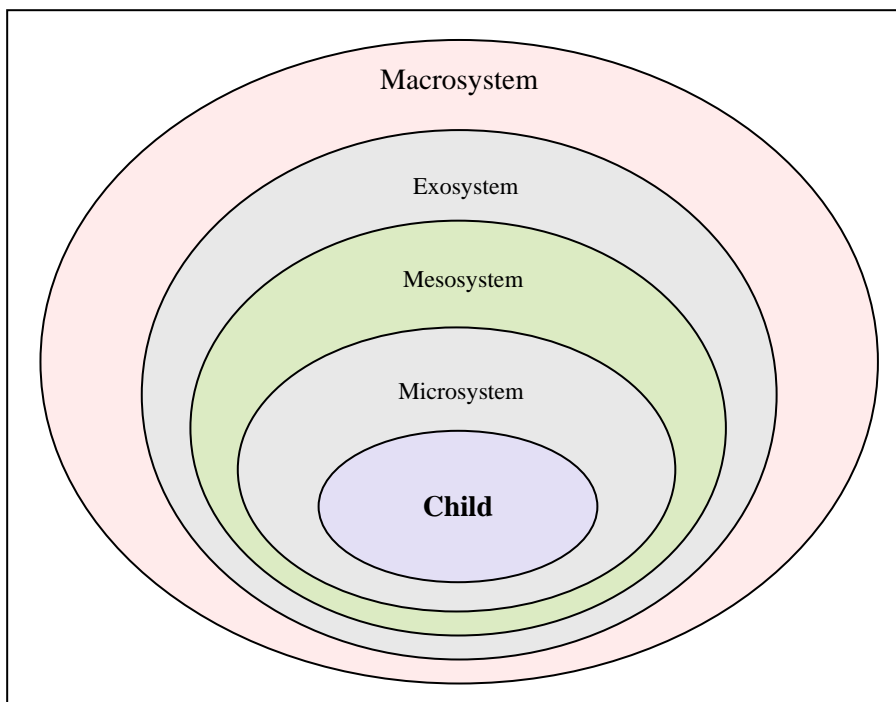
FIGURE 2:   **Components of the bioecological systems theory**

1.10   CONCEPTUALIZED TERMINOLOGY

VandenBos (2007:210) defines a concept as "an idea that represents a class of objects or events and their properties…" Therefore, in the following section I conceptualize the terms 'educational experiences', 'teachers' beliefs', and 'developmentally appropriate educational practices'.

Educational experiences: I use this term to include the *content* [what] and *method* [how] used by the teacher in the formal learning activities, planned for children's acquisition of knowledge, skills and values related to language and arithmetic activities.

Teacher beliefs: VandenBos (2007:112) defines a belief as "a more generally acceptance of the truth, reality or validity of something". In this study, I use the concept to refer to the overall worldview that teachers embrace in interpreting their practice in relation to children's educational experiences, and the external factors that relate to such a worldview. Such a worldview, I assume originate from both real as well as hypothetical experiences that teachers have in their daily interactions with children and the larger society. Because of a dynamic social context and practical experiences with

children, I conceptualize that teacher perceptions and their plan for children's educational experiences become complex.

Developmentally appropriate educational practices: DAP[14] assumes age and individual appropriateness of children's educational activities (Bredekamp in Charlesworth *et al.*, 1993:12). Consequently, I add the educational component (henceforth DAEP[15]), to *stress* all those activities that teachers adopt for children's educational *processes* (*content and method*), suitable for their developmental level according to theorists such as Piaget, Vygotsky, Dewey, Pestallozi, Montessori, and Erickson, among others, and their perspectives of how children develop and learn. This is because DAP, which originated from child development theory, "is a real and useful construct" (Charlesworth *et al.*, 1993:23). Central to the DAP framework is child-centred activities in culturally sensitive environments (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997; Charlesworth *et al.*, 1993; Klein & Chen, 2001; Kostelnik *et al.*, 2004: Jalongo *et al.*, 2004).

1.11   DEFINITION OF TERMS

I have specified actions or operations necessary to identify the terms (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006:30), to make their reference and meaning explicit. In some instances, dictionary definitions are limited so I adapt the following meanings:

Developmentally appropriate practice: As already footnoted, the term 'DAP' is widely used to refer to "teaching based on how children grow and develop" (Morrison, 2006:394). This concept originated from the USA in 1986, based on a two-year study of research into early childhood education by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). The position statement provides a synthesis of the appropriate curriculum, learning activities, adult-child interaction, home-program relations, and the evaluation of child development (Beaty, 1996:4). Although this guideline was intended for the USA, it has been widely disseminated and published and has impacted on curricular beliefs and practices throughout the world, because its definition and scope is benchmarked on principles of child development that are thought to be universal (McMullen *et al.*, 2005:451). In this study, the set of twelve principles

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[14]   I use DAP to refer to the original template as found in ECE literature.
[15]   I use DAEP specifically in my study to stress the educational components; content and process inherent in the DAP framework.

Voyage 1: A proposal for an academic journey starts

that synthesise the DAP view will be referred to as the 'DAP template' or 'DAP principles'.

Developmentally Appropriate Educational Practices: As already noted in the section 'setting the stage for the journey' in this study, these refer to the discussion of the five constructs used in the study: teaching strategy, use of materials, scheduling, assessment and consideration for children's individuality, in juxtaposition to DAP.

Education: VandenBos (2007:314) defines education as "the process of teaching or acquiring knowledge, skills and values". I use the term to refer to teaching and learning strategies, which include the process used, and the content that the teachers plan for children to acquire knowledge, skills and values.

Developmental stage: VandenBos (2007:275) define the development stage as "a period of development during which specific abilities and characteristics or behavioural patterns appear". In this study, it involves children between four and five years of age, and I extend it to embrace cultural expectations of the learning capabilities of the preschoolers, as determined by context variables. This is based on the assumption that there are educational activities at the preschool that should be suitable for children in this age range.

Practice: Kostelnik *et al.* (2004:59) define practice as the "use of new behaviour or knowledge repeatedly and in a variety of ways".

Academic preschools: I coined this phrase exclusively to refer to those schools where teachers occupy children between three and five years predominantly with paper and pen assignments during classroom activities. Additionally, the term refers to schools that are highly structured towards the acquisition of 'the 3Rs' (reading, writing and arithmetic skills). A high level of content and subject-based structure prevailing in the school timetable categorizes such schools as 'academic'.

Academise: I coined this term to refer to instances whereby the preschool teacher overloads preschool children with written tasks during the learning activities.

Constructivist learning: Morrison (2006:393) defines a constructivist process of learning "as a continuous mental organisation structuring and restructuring of experiences in relation to schemes of thought, or mental images which result in cognitive growth". I use this term to encompass all the opportunities for children to contribute freely to knowledge generation through questioning and manipulation of materials. The child could do this independently or with the guidance and support of the teacher.

DICECE early learning environment: This environment includes preschools that practice under a DICECE policy of early learning in Kenya (Marlow-Ferguson, 2002:738: Republic of Kenya, 1994:39; NACECE, 1999).

Montessori early childhood development: Early learning centres that use the Montessori early childhood curriculum.

Montessori Method: This a method based on Dr. Montessori's belief that children actively engage with their environment using self-correcting material (Collins & O'Brien, 2003:225; Montessori, 1920).

Montessori teachers: These are teachers trained under the Montessori philosophy and who teach at Montessori or DICECE oriented preschools.

KCSE: The terminal examination after secondary school, called Kenya Secondary School Certificate of Education (KCSE), qualifies students to proceed to university for an undergraduate degree (Marlow-Ferguson, 2002:739).

Preschool/ nursery/ kindergarten/ early childhood education and care: In Kenya, these terms are used interchangeably to refer to child education before six-years-of-age. In Kenya, most children start school at the age of three-to-five years and it is divided into three levels; baby class (three years), middle class (four years) and top class (five years). Most of the preschools do not have a primary school attached to them. Qualifying children move to different primary schools, often within the same locality (NACECE, 1999:20). I use the term preschool to refer to the education of children between three and five years.

Preschool teacher: The Oxford Dictionary of English (Soanes, & Stevenson 2005:1809; 1381) defines a teacher as "a person who teaches especially in school". In addition, it

defines preschool as "relating to the time before a child is old enough to go to school". Additionally, Collins and O'Brien (2003:279) define preschool as "care and curriculum designed to meet the needs of children ages three to five years…" I use the phrase "preschool teacher" therefore to refer to an adult who has received qualification in early childhood training and who cares for children between three and five in centre-based care.

Primary school: After three years in preschool, children at the age of six, often admitted through a written test, enter primary school for eight years, (graded standard one to standard eight). At the end of eight years in primary school, candidates sit for Kenya Primary School Certificate of Education (KCPE), to qualify for secondary selection (Marlow-Ferguson, 2002:738).

Highly structured approach: I coined this phrase during data analysis to refer to limited flexibility in most lessons.

Subject-based approach: A phrase that I coined during data analysis based on the content covered during the lesson that reflects isolated subjects such as Arithmetic, Kiswahili or English.

On-time schedule planning: This is a phrase used to denote the amount of time allowed for the completion of tasks.

Teaching strategy: This means the general and specific approach used by a teacher to engage the children in the learning process.

Learning materials: These are all the tangible manipulative materials available for the children to use in the learning process.

Silencing of materials: I use the metaphor of 'silenced materials' throughout the study, as an illustration that although teachers had materials and opportunities to use them they did not engage children with these.

Learner differences/individuality/differentiation: These terms refer to children's differences based on their learning abilities and tempo in task completion.

Assessment: In this study, the term is limited to how teachers appraised the children's educational experiences.

The interview: this is an entry examination presented to five- and six-year-old children as a qualifying examination to join primary school.

Chasing the interview: Is a phrase that I derived from the interviews with the teachers, expressing their haste to engage children with academic subjects.

The preschool teaching seesaw model: I derived this terminology from the interview data where teachers seemed to emphasize child-centred approaches while they used teacher-directed approaches.

1.12   ASSUMPTIONS OF THE STUDY

For the sake of this study, I make the following assumptions:

1.   I assumed that teachers who are trained are conversant with theories of child development, which largely contribute to the DAP framework (Charlesworth *et al.*, 1993:23). DAP is largely influenced by Piaget, Vygotsky and Erikson (Kostelnik *et al.*, 2004:20; Rushton & Larkin, 2001:26).

2.   In addition, I also assumed that the teachers trained in various early curricula were free to implement DAP in their classes.

3.   I also assumed that the DAP framework is not an 'either or'- framework, pitting DAP, against DIP, but rather a set of flexible guidelines that exist on a continuum. The more child-centred, individually focused practices are, the more DAP it is; and that the more teacher-directed and centred practices are, the more DIP it is, and the less DAP it is (Charlesworth *et al.*, 1993; Kostelnik *et al.*, 2004:33-9 Stipek, in Kontos & Dunn, 1993, Stipek *et al.*, 1995:220). Therefore, I assumed that children's educational experiences would fall within the DAP-DIP continuum.

4.   I further assumed that preschool teachers held beliefs that relate to children's educational experiences, and that this would form the basis of our discussion.

5.   I assumed that teachers are capable of linking their beliefs to a developmentally appropriate practices framework.

1.13   THE OUTLINE OF THE ENTIRE VOYAGE

Voyage number one: The beginning of this academic journey locates the genesis of my topic in my own preschool experiences in juxtaposition to my professional career as a university lecturer, my role conflict as a mother of a preschooler, and the general dynamics of education in general and of preschool provision in particular, in the Kenyan context.

Voyage number two: In this part of the journey, I provide an academic link between my study and those of others who have either conceptualised or researched issues related to the historical background of preschool provision. The areas covered include the origins of ideas guiding ECE, a brief overview of the progenitors of these ideas and a detailed explanation of Montessori principles (because one of my study sites was a Montessori preschool) is covered. In addition, three views of readiness, rationale for interest in ECE, empirical studies related to teachers' beliefs and developmentally appropriate practices and reviewed.

*Voyage number three***:** In this part of the journey, I justify my adoption of the constructivist paradigm after engaging with the paradigm contestations. I also provide details of the three methods of data collection, namely: observation using video and photography, and interviewing through visual elicitation. I also provide a summary of the study context and participants, in addition to the ethical principles of confidentiality, voluntary participation, and sensitivity to participants.

Voyage number four: This section presents a qualitative data analysis framework and outline of the way I derived the themes in the study from a combination of a bottom-up/grounded theory (inductive) approach and a priori (deductive analysis). The themes derived from the inductive analysis are subsumed into five DAP constructs; teaching strategy, use of materials, scheduling of activities, assessment and consideration for children's individuality. In addition, it gives a summary of the criteria for credibility the current research that includes positionality, reflexivity, thick description, prolonged engagement, triangulation and generalisability.

*Voyage number five***:** This is the data presentation and interpretation chapter. The themes derived in voyage four are presented as follows under the DAP constructs; Teaching strategy relates to the sub-themes on choral reading, copying and written task-based activities (teaching strategy), the sub-theme on use and silencing of materials is

presented under the main theme on use of materials. I present the third sub-theme of subject-based schedules that embraced the use of schemes of work under scheduling of children's work. Assessment that reflected a subject-based approach limited to paper and pencil workbooks that focused on academic content is presented as the fourth sub-theme under assessment. Children's differential abilities that were expressed in differentiated copying and written task-based activities, but did not consider the tempo and interest of the children are presented as the last theme.

Voyage number six: This voyage is a synthesis of the factors that influence preschool teachers' beliefs of DAEP. These factors are linked to several sources of perceived pressure, such as preparation for the transition interview, different transition curricula, peer pressure, perceived competitive school environment, and responses to the changing times.

Voyage number seven: In this voyage, I extrapolate the themes into a DAP framework and Maria Montessori principles that are subsumed in the bioecological theory of development. In this voyage, I explore and advance a seesaw model for understanding preschool teachers' beliefs of developmentally appropriate practices.

Voyage number eight: This voyage presents a synthesis of the findings, conclusions and recommendation for further research and practice.

A brief sojourn after voyage one

We need to review what we have 'seen' and 'heard' so far…

In summary, chapter one dealt with;

The purpose and justification for the study of the study

The research questions;

Who is Rose in the study?
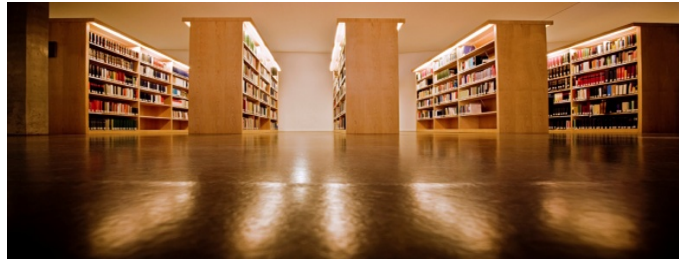
A brief background to the study

Some definitions…..conceptualized terminology

Assumptions of the study; A general structure of the thesis

*So that we appreciate
the need to go
further along
On this journey*

Voyage 1: A proposal for an academic journey starts

VOYAGE TWO
LINKING WITH OTHER VOYAGERS
# IN A SIMILAR DIRECTION

Preview of voyage two

1. *Who else has travelled a similar road*
   (Subject based literature)

2. *What means of travel have others used?*
   (Methods)

3. *Whom did they take along on their journey (Participants)*

4. *Where did the binoculars focus?*
   (Focus of previous studies)

   How different will my voyage be…?
   (My point of departure: Going my own way)

Voyage 2: Linking with other voyagers in a similar direction

2.1   A GENERAL INTRODUCTION

"By necessity, by proclivity, and by delight, we all quote" Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882).

The purpose of my literature review is three-fold; first, I provide a synopsis of the historical and philosophical foundations of early childhood education; second, I explore previous empirical studies to identify how my study links with them; and thirdly, I examine how my study complements previous studies. Figure 3 (below) gives a summary of the literature focus and the rationale for selection.
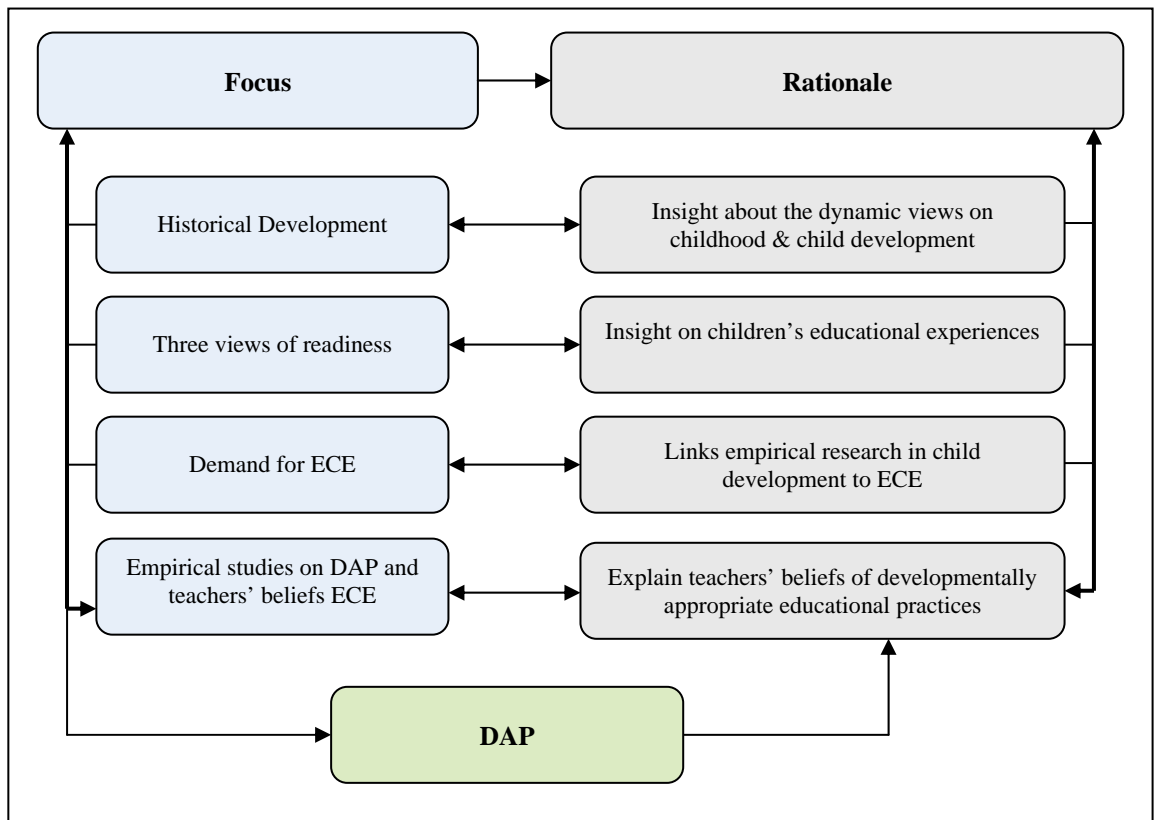
FIGURE 3:   **A summary of the focus and rationale for selected literature**

The literature has two main sections: the first providing a general conceptual framework on early childhood education, the second exploring the empirical studies on teacher's beliefs and developmentally appropriate practice (DAP)[18]. The focus of the former includes a general overview of the historical development of early childhood education, and the origins of the ideas guiding early child development and curriculum, including

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[18]   NB: DAP are 12 principles synthesized from empirical and conceptual literature about best practices for children's education and development.

the Montessori philosophy and the rationale for interest in early childhood education services. In addition, I present three views of school readiness. The second part of the literature review explores empirical studies on teachers' beliefs as they relate to their practices.

2.2 THE HISTORY OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

"By understanding and telling the story of the past, we are better equipped to interpret our own history, to have a sense of mission and purpose" (Gordon & Browne, 2000:8).

2.2.1 A GENERAL OVERVIEW

The following section explores the historical development of early childhood development (ECD) in general, and early childhood development and education (ECDE) in particular, as the two are interlinked (Braun & Edwards, 1972:8). Another term used for ECDE is early childcare and education (ECE), defined as "any care on a regular basis by someone other than a child's immediate family members" (Altenhofen, Davy, & Biringen, 2008:295). I present distinct social and economic challenges over the centuries, together with the contributors to the ideas in education generally, and early childcare and education (ECE) in particular. Through this history one appreciates not only the dynamic conceptions of the child but also the practices of ECE used in many parts of the world today, that reflect the claim that history informs educational policy that guide ECE programs (Morrison, 2006:90; Prochner & Kabiru, 2008:117). I conclude this section with a synthesis of why it is relevant to know the historical developments in ECE.

The history of the origins and progression of ideas related to child development provide a holistic picture of the current practices (Morrison, 2006:90-91), and a possible glimpse into the future, since "children, by their very existence, [provide] the link from the past and present to the future" (Kristjansson, 2006:36). Social needs also affect the provision of education, since "a society's definition of childhood influences how it educates its children" (Gordon & Browne, 2000:9), and the direction such education takes (Kilderry, Nolan & Noble, 2004:24).

Although this review derives from a predominantly Western view of the child, a context that might be different from the current study context, authors have acknowledged that

ideologies originating from the West have influenced teacher training and the development of ECE curriculum in some developing countries, such as Kenya (Adams & Swadener, 2000; Prochner & Kabiru, 2008; Pence & Marfo, 2008). Educational practices in many parts of the world are offshoots of ideas originating from Greece and Rome (Gordon & Browne, 2000:9), which have continued to infiltrate educational practices throughout the world. These ideas spread either through colonial influences, (Gakuru; Hyde & Kabiru, in Prochner & Kabiru, 2008:126; Pence & Marfo, 2008:82; Trawick-Smith, 2003:20), through conferences and other publications (McMullen *et al.*, 2005:463), or through workshops and collaborations (Adams & Swadener, 2000:386). Lately, such technology as the internet has made ideas even more porous and readily available than previously possible. Knight (cited by Kilderry *et al.*, 2004:27) refers to this as a "new knowledge- based society".

Consequent to this proliferation of ideas in education, and of information generally, ECDE has taken different directions over the years. The approach that adults take towards the development, care and education of children depends on a society's perception and value attached to children and childhood. Notions of childhood invariably vary in time and place (Fromberg, 2007:467; Gordon & Browne, 2000:8; Kilderry *et al.*, 2004:24; Kristjansson, 2006:20; Monighan-Naurot 2005:3 Penn, 2000:9; Robinson & Diaz, 2006:6; Samuelsson, 2006:115; Smidt, 2006:5; deMause in Trawick-Smith 2003:17;Wayness, 2006). The perception of children which invariable affects their development is dynamic and variable in cultural contexts as expressed in the following sentiment:

> ... images of childhood have changed over time and do change with place … conceptions people have about childhood will relate not only to childhood itself but also to attitudes to children…to how they learn and develop morally, intellectually and emotionally, and what their rights are (Smidt, 2006:4).

Through time, conceptions of the child and of childhood have continued to change. The following section captures some of the developments that have influenced childhood education from the 18th through the 20th century period. Alongside the developments are the people who contributed to ECDE as it is known today.

2.2.2 THE 18TH AND 19TH CENTURY PERCEPTION OF CHILDREN AND CHILDHOOD

During the 18th century, childcare served to purify the child's inherent evil nature (Gordon & Browne, 2000:10; Smidt, 2006:5; Pollock, in Trawick-Smith, 2003:17; Weber, in Monighan-Nourot, 2005:3). During this period, a puritan ethos in the church dominated the psyche of society (Gordon & Browne, 2000:10), and a belief that children inherited the essentially evil nature of man at birth. Therefore, education began at the age of 7 years, when society considered the child as a miniature adult (Braun & Edwards, 1972:7; Henson, 2003:7). The 'dame schools' in America then became contexts for moral and spiritual cleansing, aimed at ridding children of that inherent evil (Weber, in Monighan-Naurot, 2005:3), often by "beating the devil out of them" (Pollock, in Trawick-Smith, 2003:17). To counter what was termed by some 'original sin', after Eve and Adam's transgressions in the Biblical Garden of Eden, the children were made to sit up straight while memorising and reciting verses. This was a particularly valued activity, since writing and reading materials were also scarce. Consequently, learning was limited to memorization and recitation of the Psalms and alphabetical symbols (Monighan-Nourot, 2005:3-4). Heavy discipline, which included corporal punishment, sitting on 'the shame bench' and the wearing of a dunce's cap predominated (Gutek, in Monighan-Nourot, 2005:3).

This became '*the dark age*' for children who society considered as non-persons, lacking identity, care and appreciation (Braun & Edwards, 1972:3; Gordon & Browne, 2000:10; Aries; Bjorklund & Bjorklund both in Trawick-Smith, 2003:17). Classical European education was a preserve of the upper-classes, and then it was mainly for boys (Braun & Edwards, 1972:24; Monighan-Nourot, 2005:4; Gordon & Browne, 2000:9). If girls were educated it was often merely training in domestic work or trade, and then for the middle-class only (Gordon & Browne, 2000:9).

However, the value of children changed in the 19th century, as a period of 'enlightenment' for parents and society emerged (Trawick-Smith, 2003:17; Smidt, 2006:3). In contrast to the view of an 'evil child', Rousseau's competing idea of a 'naturally good' child, expressed in his book '*Emile*' (1762), advanced childhood as a unique period that parents and teachers should respect (Smidt, 2006:5; Trawick-Smith, 2003:17; Warner & Sower, 2005:4). Universal education and literacy for all replaced the

ideas of an inherently evil child, and there was a reaction to gender, class, and racial bias in schools, which now taught reading, writing, arithmetic and bookkeeping (Gordon & Browne, 2000:10). Emerging during this time was a more considerate and encompassing attitude to the social training of children (DeMause, in Trawick-Smith, 2003:17). Children growing up during this period received physical, emotional, social and intellectual care (Trawick-Smith, 2003:17). At the same time, there began an integrated curriculum for early childhood education. Therefore, some of the basic principles advanced to guide early childhood, such as the 'whole child' philosophy, can be said to have had their origins in the 19th century thinking. In the following section I preview the progenitors of some of the ideas that prevail in ECE today. Several people advanced many ideas that guide it, including John Amos Comenius (a Czech educator, 1592-1670), John Locke (1632-1714), Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778), and Johann Heinrich Pestallozi (1746-1827) (Morrison, 2006:95-121).

In conclusion, the ideas advanced during the 19th century laid a foundation for the 20th century advancement of ECE ideas. Although each of the contributors during this period emphasized different views about children, most of them underscored their individuality, nurturance through manipulation of materials, and an environment that respected their autonomy. These ideas prevail today (Blakemore & Frith, 2005:461; Bredekamp & Copple, 1997:125; Broadhead, 2001:34; Crowther & Wellhousen, 2004:185; Jalongo *et al.*, 2004; Montessori, 1920:23). The 20th century contributors later refined these ideas to guide early childhood education. The following section previews some of the ideas advanced during this time.

2.2.3   THE 20TH CENTURY PROGRESSION OF EARLY CHILDHOOD IDEAS

"The 20th century has been called the century of the child" (Gordon & Browne, 2000:162).

The contributors who continued to advance the needs of the child during this period include Maria Montessori (1870-1952), the first female physician in Italy, John Dewey (1859-1952), grouped among Progressive educators, and G. Stanley Hall (1844-1924), who is credited with the Child Study Movement. Arnold Gesell (1880-1961), a student of Hall and a co-pioneer advanced this Movement through laboratory observations of the norms of child behaviour. Experiments on normative behaviour led to conclusions of

characteristic age-appropriate development, as it is known today (Monighan-Nourot, 2005:13). The Child Study Movement and ideas about teaching were influenced by the ideas of Jean Piaget (1896-1980) and Lev Vygotsky (1896-1934). John Dewey became one of the most influential theorists behind American education and philosophy (Henson, 2003:9; Morrison, 2006:100). However, details of all the 20th century contributors to ECE, except those of Montessori, are beyond the scope of this review. In the following section I consider the current view of the child and of childhood.

2.2.4   THE PRESENT IS HERE: CHILDHOOD IN THE 21ST CENTURY

> Childhood across different cultures and historical points in time means that there are multiple and different readings and experiences of what it means to be a child; therefore, understandings of childhood are not fixed (Robinson & Diaz, 2006:6).

In the 21st century, despite the dominant Western ideas that still define and guide early childhood education in many parts of the world, authors predict a changing view of childhood and children that should reflect their unique circumstances. These circumstances arise from political, historical and socio-economic realities, all of which cohere to constitute a multi-cultural perspective of children today (Pence & Marfo, 2008:79-80; Robinson & Diaz, 2006:6; Smidt, 2006:14). For example, Smidt (2006:5) argues for an ephemeral and a culturally situated childhood, because childhood and children are a creation of adults fashioned in "time and place, responding to the economic, political, and religious, class, and political influences and challenges in place". Trawick-Smith (2003:22) adds that the children of the world have their own unique identity, originating from their historical roots and cultural practices. Pence and Marfo (2008:82) argue for the development of culturally situated ECD practices in Sub-Saharan Africa that respond to cultural diversity. The bioecological systems theory, which is adapted to understand the practices observed in the current study, advances the latter position.

The discourse towards de-centred childhood and pedagogical practices originate from postcolonial theories, among them, critical theory and other social theories such as the bioecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; 2005; Thomas, 2000:403-3). In the 21st century, the move from the notion of the 'universal child' (Robinson & Diaz, 2006:6), continue to advance a concept of childhood and children within a social context

in which children grow, because such social dynamics and their impact vary by context (Koops, 2004:13; Kilderry *et al.*, 2004; Warner & Sower, 2005:24; Wyness, 2006). Kristjansson (2006:20-1) captures how the notion of the 'child' presented in two dichotomies, the *prospective* and the *here and now*, might influence the value attached to childhood and children. In the former, society values children because they are a future asset to themselves, their families and society, as vehicles of cultural transmission.

Different views of childhood pertain in various societies. Some societies emphasize childlike features as prospective assets related to adulthood, and the faster children develop towards adulthood, the better. This is the pragmatic view of children as future assets (Hirsch, in Saracho & Spodek, 2003:181; Kristjansson, 2006:20-1). In other societies, the romantic view of childhood that emphasizes the *here and now* view of children value childhood for its own sake. This view of childhood values child-like attributes, such as playfulness, fantasy and childish orientation, positively; hence, it is developmentally important for children to play more than receive instruction from adults (Kristjansson, 2006:21; Saracho & Spodek in Saracho & Spodek, 2003:181). The contrary might be true for the prospective view.

The typology of the value of children advanced by Kristjansson (2006) is imperative to the DAP template, as the set of principles that distinguish childhood as a unique period of growth (Saracho & Spodek, 2002:181). Whereas the pragmatic *prospective* view is likely to develop future survival skills among children, the *romantic or here and now* view is likely to embrace playfulness and fantasy among children, allowing them to enjoy and develop holistically in their childhood.

Consequently, political, economic, and social reforms, plus the value attached to children, have influenced changes in the view of children and their curriculum throughout history. The review of the historical developments of ideas related to children and childhood is significant because most of the 'current innovations' models of curriculum are offshoots of developments from historical times (Saracho & Spodek, 2003:176). While Wyness (2006:145) notes that schools are sites that children develop 'routines and form habits that determine their broader social position', Wishard *et al.* (2003:96) conclude that children's daily experiences in childcare are entrenched in social, cultural and historical values of the community. Therefore, in the 21st century, childcare advocates advance a view of children that is culturally, politically and socially

sensitive to capture the reality, not of a universal childhood, but one that embrace diversity and difference. In the next section, I present the historical trends that have shaped ECE, before considering the Montessori curriculum in the subsequent section.

2.2.5   CONCLUDING REMARKS: ORIGINS OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

The review of the historical development, and of individuals who contributed to the development of ideas guiding ECE, as it is known in many parts of the world, provides insight into the methods and approaches for teaching children. It presents educational experiences observed in the current study, with the DAP template having derived its principles on the conceptual and empirical research during the 19th and 20th century. The following section gives a brief of the Montessori system of education.

2.2.6   MONTESSORI SYSTEM OF EDUCATION

The following section introduces the origins of the Montessori curriculum, besides the principles inherent in the method. In addition, I link the Montessori approach to the DAP principles. This provides a perspective on the expectations of preschool educational experiences in the Montessori preschool observed.

2.2.6.1   The origins of Maria Montessori philosophy

Maria Montessori (1870-1952) was a female Italian physician who worked with poor and cognitively challenged children living in the slum areas of Rome. She opened a school within a house called *Casa dei Bambini* (the children's house) in 1907 to motivate and provide a learning environment suited to these children's needs (Braun & Edwards, 1972:111; Gordon & Browne, 2000:15; Grisham-Brown *et al.*, 2005:28-9; Torrence & Chattin-McNichols, 2005:363; Montessori, 1920:43; Morgan, 2007:35; VandenBos, 2007:590). These children's houses were later to accommodate children both with and without physiological challenges, and where Montessori continued to refine her teaching method.

Based on her experiences at the children's houses, Montessori developed a philosophy and a theory of child development (Gordon & Browne, 2003:15; Montessori, 1920; Morgan, 2007:35). Froebel greatly influenced her educational philosophy, while Edouard Senguin influenced both her method and materials' design, especially those related to

sense training (Braun & Edwards, 1972:110). Montessori's curriculum emphasizes an education through the senses. The following section is a brief about the basic principles of Montessori learning.

2.2.6.2   Principles of Montessori learning

Montessori believed that education should enhance the psychological development of the child, through interaction with a 'prepared environment', rather than teaching them *per se* (Braun & Edwards, 1972:119; Wolf, in Monighan-Nourot, 2005:16; Montessori, 1920; Morgan, 2007:38; Santrock, 2001:520). In her view, learning results from a 'prepared environment' with a sense of order and freedom of guided expression, with carefully sequenced materials that represented various stages of difficulty for the child (Gordon & Browne, 2000:16; Monighan-Nourot, 2005:16; Montessori, 1920). Contrasting her view with what she considered as pedagogic slavery, where children had little freedom for self-expression, Montessori observed:

> Slavery still pervades pedagogy, and …schools. I need only one proof-the stationary desks and chairs like a butterfly mounted on pins, each fastened to his place, the desk, spreading the useless wings of barren and meaningless knowledge they have acquired (Montessori, 1920:14-15).

As part of the Montessori curriculum, each child ought to experience freedom of movement as it suits his or her interest and current level of mastery. Therefore, Montessori emphasized the role of individualized attention, as children learn through self-correcting materials that involve touch, thermal, visual, and auditory senses as the source of their cognitive development (VandenBos, 2007:590).

In her view, even without teaching words to children, sensory experiences do lead to the development of vocabulary. She also developed materials for reading, writing and arithmetic, such as wooden cylinders, geometric insets, sandpaper letters, and graded rods (Braun & Edwards, 1972:119; Montessori, 1920). Montessori became the first educationist to recognize that children's furniture should match their body size (Gordon & Browne, 2000:15; Torrence & Chattin-McNichols, 2005:365; Montessori, 1920).

Montessori philosophy has transcended its original Roman borders to many parts of the world, although its first appearance in America in 1909 had a poor reception because the flexibility of methods and variable interpretations were prone to misinterpretation. In

addition, parents' demands for a focus in academics led to the rejection of the Montessori Method (Chattin-McNichols in Gordon & Browne, 2000:16). However, this trend was reversed in the late 1950s and 1960s through the second American Montessori Society, founded by Dr. Nancy McCormick Rambusch, as a response to the differences between Europeans and Americans regarding the approach to Montessori curriculum (Gordon & Browne, 2000:16).

Torrence and Chattin-McNichols (2005:363) conclude that despite an earlier perception that Montessori's ideas were radical, current theories in early education have changed to reflect what Montessori proposed. Consequently, such changes are currently reflected in ECE that incorporate such principles as material manipulations by children, an acknowledgement that the preschool is the 'sensitive period', or an aspect of the 'window of opportunity theory' (Sorgen, in Ruston & Larkin, 2001:30), when the timing of providing certain developmental opportunities has more impact on the child. The inclusion of parents as partners in their children's education is also one of Montessori's recommendations (Shute, in Torrence & Chattin-McNichols, 2005:364). The Montessori method has continued to spread out to many parts of the world (Morgan, 2007:36); with some American states indicating a doubling in Montessori schools in recent years (Saracho & Spodek, 2003:175). In Kenya, the increase in Montessori schools appears undocumented, but the presence of teacher training colleges in the country that train Montessori teachers points to the likelihood of a possible increase in preschools that offer Montessori education. In the next section, I examine current notions of children and childhood, which invariably affect ECE, before turning to the views of readiness, that have link with the historical development of ECDE.

2.2.6.3   Relating Montessori Method and DAP principles

The value of sensorial materials to train the child's senses are emphasized in the Montessori system of education, just as DAP recommends that children should engage actively in their environment to construct knowledge (Blakemore & Frith, 2005:461; Bredekamp & Copple, 1997:125; Broadhead, 2001:34; Crowther & Wellhousen, 2004:185; Foot *et al.*, 2004:144; Montessori, 1920:23; Seefeldt & Wasik, 2006:16-17). DAP emphasizes the uniqueness of children in their modal ways of learning. Children use different modal ways to learn, such as, auditory, tactile, visual, taste and smell. This

was Montessori's basic assumption when she proposed several types of materials that children could use (Montessori, 1920).

Montessori proposed that as part of language development, the directress question children about "whether they have shown in their family what they have learnt at school" (Montessori, 1920:124), an activity that recognised parents as partners in the child's education. DAP underscores the value of recognising children's backgrounds, and their strengths and weakness, as part of their learning, to reflect their social-cultural diversity and their unique approach to learning (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997; Charlesworth *et al.*, 1993; Charlesworth, 1998; Grisham-Brown *et al.*, 2005; Jalongo *et al.*, 2004:144; Klein & Chen, 2001:17; Kontos & Dunn, 1993; Kostelnik *et al.*, 2004). Multi-age grouping in Montessori early learning encourages a sense of community, peer-teaching, flexible group work and collaborative learning (Kostelnik *et al.*, 2004:32). The DAP principles recognize the value of developing a sense of community among learners (NAEYC, 1997; 2009).

Because Montessori emphasized the principles that recognize the value of the child's education through the senses (their bodies), an individualized approach to learning that suits each child's unique style of learning, and the involvement of the parents in the education of their children, seems to foreground the principles of DAP. Literature on early childhood often considers the Montessori Method to embrace DAP (Grisham-Brown *et al.*, 2005; Kostelnik *et al.*, 2004). The following section is a review of views of children's readiness that might shape the ECE pedagogy.

2.3   THREE VIEWS OF CHILDREN'S READINESS

"With theoretical underpinnings…we have tools with which to make our way into the world of children and early childhood education" (Gordon & Browne, 2000:162).

2.3.1   INTRODUCTION

In this section, I consider three views of children's readiness to understand the origin of best practices for children as advanced in the DAP template. These are the maturational, behaviourist and constructivist view of children, all of which have their origins in child development theories, the basis upon which teachers decide on children's educational

experiences. For each view, there is more than one theorist contributing. However, I explore the basic ideas, rather than the theorists associated with them.

Theories of child development, learning or readiness to learn not only explain the dynamics of child development, but also the role that adults can play in children's learning process (Charlesworth, 2008:90-91). Generally, readiness is an estimation of when and how children are ready to learn certain materials and to function successfully within a pre-determined curriculum (Kagan; Lewitt & Becker, both in Carlton & Winsler, 1999:338).

Seefeldt & Wasik (2006:22) observe that:

> Readiness is a fact. There is no doubt that some kinds of learning take place more easily and readily at a specific age…amount of previous learning determines the amount of new learning...Readiness is defined as being prepared and equipped- arranged for performance, immediate action, or use.

Perspectives on readiness influence the various dimensions of preschool provision such as "purpose for school, the process of schooling, children's roles in the schooling process" as well as the role expected of both teachers and parents in the schooling process, all of which are influenced by culture (Morrison, 2006:223). Although the concept of school readiness has contested meanings for different stakeholders (Carlton & Winsler, 1999:338; DiBello & Neuharth-Pritchett, 2008; Morrison, 2006:219; Wasik & Seefeldt, 2006), a discussion of the three views of readiness clarifies some sources of contention.

2.3.2 THE MATURATIONAL VIEW OF READINESS

Maturational theorists acknowledge that growth, development, and learning emerge from within the individual as natural processes predetermined at birth (Charlesworth, 2008:91; Gesell, in Seefeldt & Wasik, 2006:22; Trawick-Smith, 2003:37; Warner & Sower, 2005:42). The maturational view suggest that children's growth processes advance through a series of invariant stages, with more skill and refinement in the later than the preceding stages, as the organism interacts with the environment (Carlton & Winsler, 1999; Seefeldt & Wasik, 2006:23; Warner & Sower, 2005:42). Hall and Gesell (cited in Carlton & Winsler, 1999:338; Trawick-Smith, 2003:37; Warner & Sower, 2005:44; Winter & Kelley, 2008) contributed to the development of theories linked to the

maturational view, which dominated early childhood thinking up to the first-half of the 20th century. Through his observations, Gesell delineated ages and stages of childhood. Therefore, according to the maturational view, the unfolding of the child's internal processes is natural and occurs as the individual grows and matures, according to the genetic blueprint or a 'pre-wired' condition of the individual (Kostelnik *et al.*, 2004:46-47; Trawick-Smith, 2003:37), suggesting a similarity of abilities among children of a certain age (Warner & Sower, 2005:42). However, this view could not explain development beyond the white middle-class cultures from which Gesell made his observations, since these did not include children from other cultures, races or classes (Dei *et al.*, in Trawick-Smith, 2003:39). Besides, Gesell's work met criticism for excluding children who did not fit within the normal range of development, culture or linguistic skills. The maturational theories could only explain what happens during maturation, and they did not explain the logic behind the unfolding of these innate tendencies. Maturation theorists suggest that before a child is ready, he or she cannot benefit from experiences, even when there is an interaction with the environment.

Some principles originating from the maturation proponents still guide preschool education to date. Seefeldt and Wasik, (2006:25) list some contributions to learning; firstly, maturationists support the unfolding of children's abilities within conducive conditions (Jensen, in Seefeldt & Wasik, 2006:25). Secondly, the growth process can be predicted, regardless of individual variations, and thirdly, normal growth and development originates from maturation-related research (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997; Kostelnik *et al.*, 2004:42-3; NAEYC, 1997:6). Proponents of the maturation theories support class repetition or 'red shirting' of children who have not attained a certain age (Cameron & Wilson, cited in Carlton & Winsler, 1999; Gay, in Seefeldt & Wasik, 2006). Consequently, teachers who subscribe to this view wait for the natural unfolding of innate ability, rather than speeding up the growth process (Seefeldt & Wasik, 2006:24) in view of the false belief that development precedes learning and given more time, the child might be ready (Carlton & Winsler, 1999:339).

However, maturational theorists seemed to overlook environmental influences on learning. Carlton and Winsler (1999) discuss problematic issues related to relying on the maturation perspective to determine a child's school readiness-related experiences. First, readiness related non-standardised tests that are not culturally sensitive to children's

prior experiences, exclude them from school, second, these tests do not discriminate between children who need special services or those who are not yet 'ready' and finally, the use of readiness related testing means more exclusion of children who cannot cope with a scaled up curriculum.

Although the maturation perspective presupposes universality of stages of growth and development, it does not fully explain variability of development, if the genetic makeup, which is never the same for any two human beings, is considered. However, the maturation-related theories and research are still useful explaining what the nature of childhood and the developmental needs for children at this stage.

Therefore, behaviourists countered this proposal by linking external experiences, rather than innate tendencies to human growth, development and learning. This alternative view follows in the next section.

2.3.3   THE BEHAVIOURAL VIEW OF READINESS

The behaviourists' view of readiness contrasts with that of the maturational theorists, because they propose that the environment is critical to the processes of growth and development. The behavioural theories opposed the view that growth and development emerge because of the genetic unfolding; rather, they argue, growth and development results from people making stimulus-response connections in a progressive way to influence behaviour (Seefeldt & Wasik, 2006:25; Warner & Sower, 2005:43). Therefore, mental development and learning result from these neural connections.

Behaviourists include E.L. Thorndike (1874-1949), credited for his Stimulus-Response theory, and B.F. Skinner (1904-1990), who proposed the theory of operant conditioning. In this theory, Skinner proposed that consequences of behaviour result in learning. Moreover, learning is a cumulative process in which current learning builds on prior learning, as a cumulative process that leads to growth (Seefeldt & Wasik, 2006:25-26; Warner & Sower, 2005:43). Moreover, direct-instruction in which behaviour is broken into attainable outcomes originates from the behavioural theoretical orientation. This latter view mandates an active role for the teacher, who controls and guides the process of learning by designing the learning environment and focusing on certain skills and specific learning objectives (Seefeldt & Wasik, 2006:26).

However, despite the scientific basis of the stimulus-response connections in the learning process, the behavioural view of readiness faced criticism for its mechanistic view of the human being (Seefeldt & Wasik, 2006:27). Examples are teaching children isolated content that does not connect its themes, and drill practices aimed at simple recall that might limit children's higher order thinking (Craig, in Seefeldt & Wasik, 2006:27). In addition, behavioural views of readiness appeared to present readiness as sequential, linear and hierarchical, hence ignoring the cultural context of the children's learning. Such views fail to appreciate the multi-cultural ways of learning and expression (Brown, in Seefeldt & Wasik, 2006:27).

However, some of the best practices originate from the behaviourist view: teaching precise content with stated objectives leads to effective learning on which subsequent tasks build by assessing previous performance. Teachers are more confident about the goals for learning, because these focus learning objectives. In addition, teachers use the environment and reinforcement to promote children's learning (Charlesworth, 2008:91; Gersten & George, in Seefeldt & Wasik, 2006:27-28).

In summary, the behavioural theories contribute to an understanding of the origins of the stimulus-response connections, and the role of the external environment in learning, growth and development. Moreover, these theories laid the foundation for stated learning outcomes. The next section provides a brief overview of the constructivist view, as an alternative view of children's readiness.

2.3.4   THE CONSTRUCTIVIST VIEW OF READINESS

The constructivist approach to learning, growth and development provides an alternative view to readiness (Morrison, 2006:333). This view arose from the contention that human learning is complex, beyond the explanations given by the maturational and behavioural theories. It proposes that the interaction of both cognitive processes and environmental experiences are complimentary views to readiness (Morrison, 2006:103). Constructivists include Jean Piaget (1896-1980), Lev Vygotsky (1896-1934) and Dewey (Morrison, 2006:103; Seefeldt & Wasik, 2006:30). Constructivists assume that children are active in understanding their world (DeVries, Edmiaston, Zan, & Hildebrandt, 2002:35) and that 'spontaneous play' is the means to learn (Charlesworth, 2008:93). Although Dewey did not classify his ideas as constructivist, he suggested that learning integrates children's

social, physical, cognitive and emotional dimensions of development (Seefeldt & Wasik, 2006:30). Rushton and Larkin (2001:32) postulate that much of the modern educational terminology, such as integrated curriculum, whole-language, hands-on, authentic assessment and DAP, reflect brain-related research, but could also be rooted in Dewey's philosophy, although Piaget remains the main proponent of constructivism (Charlesworth, 2008:93).

According to Piaget, cognitive development through the processes of assimilation, accommodation and equilibration is an incremental process as individuals construct new knowledge in their interaction with their social and physical worlds (DeVries & Zan, in DeVries *et al.*, 2002:35). In his view, the cognitive processes change when an individual incorporates new information with prior knowledge, leading to the expansion of the schema and more knowledge acquisition. According to Piaget, individuals' schemata vary, although they represent distinct developmental stages which children go through at almost similar age levels, albeit with slight individual and cultural variations (Morrison, 2006:103-108; Seefeldt & Wasik, 2006:28; 29; Warner & Sower, 2005:51-53).

However, to embrace culturally sensitive approaches, in addition to maturational perspectives and behavioural influences, alternative views exist. These views embrace the impact of the socio-cultural context in human growth and development. Vygotsky's (1896-1934) ideas embrace this view. Like Piaget, he believed that maturational and environmental influences interface to explain learning. He emphasized the role of socio-cultural processes that invariably differ on their impact on the child at different stages of life, emphasizing the role of adults in 'scaffolding' the child's 'actual developmental level' to higher levels of problem-solving. He referred to the difference between the two levels of achievement as the 'zone of proximal development' (ZPD). Vygotsky's ZDP is the difference between what the child is capable of achieving and its attempt to engage with a new experience, which the teacher needs to scaffold (Charlesworth, 2008:93-94; Morrison, 2006:109-110; Seefeldt & Wasik, 2006:28-29; Vygotsky, 1978; Warner & Sower, 2005:50).

In summary, the constructivist theories emphasize the interaction of both the maturational and environmental influences in readiness. In education, teachers are encouraged to observe the child and be ready to bridge the ZPD. In addition, the constructivist view recognizes children's dialogue as a means of assessing their current

maturational level and cognitive ability that additional environmental stimulation can enhance.

2.3.5 CONCLUDING REMARKS: THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE THEORIES OF READINESS

The theories that explain child development originate from the historical developments in education and philosophy, all of which advance long-term ideas about how human growth and development relates to learning. As discussed, literature on theories of readiness present three alternative views; first, the maturational view, that stresses the role of inherent genetic influences; second, the behaviourist view, that proposes the impact of environmental or ecological influences, and third, the constructivist view, that combines both maturational and environmental influences to explain readiness and development. Consciously or not, these theories of readiness (child development) shape teacher training programmes and the professional knowledge that they apply in their classrooms. Charlesworth concludes that "the theorists [linked to various views of readiness]…view the adult role in learning a little differently" (Charlesworth, 2008:91). In addition, the developmentally appropriate template appears to have derived most of its principles from the theories of learning and child development. Consequently, theories of readiness provide insight into the possible range of children's educational experiences, besides a framework for data interpretation.

Western-based research on ECE , and the general trends in child education and development borrow from ideas which originated from Europe and North America (Neuman, 2005:188; McMullen *et al.*, 2005:463; Monighan-Nourot, 2005:12; Nutbrown, 2002:1-3; Woodhead, 2002:15; Penn, 2000:8). The British nursery school and the German Kindergarten had influences on African ECD, including those in Kenya, South Africa and Namibia (Prochner & Kabiru, 2008:121-122). The ideas affect programmes across the developing 'majority' world, including Africa, where over 90% of the world's children live, outside the Euro-Western 'minority world'; yet the vast majority of developmental and ECD literature comes from the former, in particular from the US (Pence & Marfo, 2008:80; Smidt, 2007:64).

In Kenya, collaboration between Kenyan and early childhood experts from the USA in the early 1990s, and the contributions of the World Bank, in addition to the government's collaboration with the Bernard Van Leer Foundation from 1972 to 1982, shaped the development of the ECE curriculum (Adams & Swadener, 2000:386;

Republic of Kenya & UNESCO, 2005:17). In Kenya, the roots of ECE date back to the pre-independence period in the 1940s, when the colonial government established the first preschools for European and Asian children, mainly in coffee, tea and sugar plantations (Republic of Kenya & UNESCO, 2005:17). Penn, citing the case of Namibia, provides a critical review of how donor agencies such as the World Bank use Western Models such as DAP to make local programme policies, "despite its limited evidence base and cultural narrowness" (2008:383).

Pence and Marfo (2008) and Penn (2008) correctly argue that early childhood frameworks need to reflect cultural sensitivity to reflect child rearing experiences and the circumstances in which children grow and develop. Penn (2008) further questions the applicability to the African context, of Western-based models that might include the DAP framework due to the varying contexts. However, regardless of what might seem to be cultural insensitivity of the DAP framework to children's development contexts; it might still be useful to use it as a guideline rather than a prescriptive document. Moreover, it is also useful to apply and appraise it in different cultural contexts. As part of making the DAP framework relevant to different cultural context, the subsequent revisions of DAP provide room for cultural sensitivity, as an open entry point into the DAP framework culture, regardless of perceived diversity (NAEYC 1997; 2009). DAP, having had its origins in theories and empirical research on human development and learning, the basis upon which early childhood teachers, and educators in general, are *still* trained, means that DAP might not be easily dismissible.

To conclude, the historical, social, political, and economic developments might influence current preschool policy and pedagogic practices (Monighan-Nourot, 2005:12; Morrison, 2006:90; Pence & Marfo, 2008:80; Prochner & Kabiru, 2008:121-122; Whishard *et al.*, 2003:96). Charlesworth *et al.* (1993:4) conclude that various theories of development guide different models of early education. The next section links the developments in ECE to DAP, most of which are a consolidation of theories and research supporting best practices for child development.

2.4 ORIGINS AND RATIONALE OF DAP

In this section, I explore the origins of DAP and its rationale for early childhood education, providing insight about why it has come to be incorporated into one of the most widely used documents in guiding early childhood education.

2.4.1 THE ORIGINS OF DAP

> "….DAP, based on child development theory, is a real and a useful construct"
> Charlesworth *et al.*, 1993:23).

The DAP guidelines originated in the USA, from concerns by the NAEYC about an increase in focus on skills-based teaching in early childhood care centres. The increasing number of them that use academic instruction, and a need to set standards of expectations for quality early childhood provision, motivated the genesis of the principles (Bredekamp, in Charlesworth 1998; Charlesworth *et al.*, 1993; Goldstein, 2008:254). The NAEYC first published its guidelines in 1987, proposing age and individual appropriateness of the learner as central to the learning process. This document was revised in 1997, after criticisms that it ignored the social and cultural dynamics of child development as factors that contribute to learning (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997; Charlesworth, 1998; Grisham-Brown *et al.*, 2005:6-7; Charlesworth *et al.*, 1993). Consequently, the 1997 DAP template included culturally appropriate practices as part of considerations for judging the appropriateness of early childhood practices (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997; Goldstein, 2008:254; NAEYC, 1997:9). Hence, there was produced the DAP document, recommended for use among American children from infancy through age eight.

2.4.2 UNPACKING DAP

As mentioned above, DAP guidelines have their origins in research (Charlesworth, 1998; Kostelnik *et al.*, 2004; Bredekamp & Copple, 1997; NAEYC, 1997). The DAP framework is entrenched in empirical as well as theoretical foundations of child development, clustered under the 'developmental psychology paradigm' (Kilderry *et al.*, 2004:26). The ideas about activity-based learning and the holistic approach to child development borrowed from constructivists such as Piaget, Vygotsky and Erikson (Charlesworth *et al.*, 1993; Charlesworth, 1998; Kontos & Dunn, 1993; Kostelnik *et al.*, 2004:20; Stipek, 1993). Therefore, although NAEYC developed this document for the

American context, other countries have adopted its basic principles to guide ECE provision (McMullen *et al.*, 2005), especially because the document originated from principles of child development entrenched in theory and research publicised through textbooks and conferences. Jambunathan and Caulfield, (2006:257) conclude that the DAP document has standards that "promote opportunities for appropriate growth and development of children".

Kontos and Dunn (1993:54-5) and Stipek (1993:32) wrote that since the DAP is based on theoretical and conceptual notions about best practices for children, such as active learning, exploration and experimentation with a responsive adult, then it provides a theoretically driven foundation for factors to be considered when planning for children's learning. In addition, Kontos and Dunn (1993:55) note that the role of the caregiver is articulated in the DAP principles, as one who is responsive to children's play to facilitate their learning, as well as helping to guide children's social and emotional development. Charlesworth (1998) suggests that the DAP guidelines are universal, because they are based on developmental changes over an individual's lifespan that are relatively similar across cultures. Although the initial focus of early childcare research seemed to focus on the developmental paradigm, the current approach appreciates the ecological setting of development (Bronfenbrenner, 2005; 1979; 1972; Bronfenbrenner & Evan, 2000; Marshall, 2004; Kilderry *et al.*, 2004).

Three basic principles might be summarized from the DAP guidelines. First, it emphasises a child-centred approach, which recognizes children as constructors of their knowledge, driven by their desire to explore and make sense of their world. Second, it acknowledges the children's capabilities, learning needs, developmental level and learning style; third, DAP principles acknowledge families as partners in their children's learning (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997; Charlesworth *et al.*, 1993; Charlesworth, 1998; Kontos & Dunn, 1993, Kostelnik *et al.*, 2004; Grisham-Brown *et al.*, 2005).

Therefore, all the 12 principles are usually summarized into three pillars of DAP; principles of how children develop and learn; concern for children's individuality, and a culturally and contextually responsive considerations during their learning. Grisham-Brown *et al.* (2005:21) caution that the DAP framework alone does not meet the definition of a curriculum framework, despite its significance in providing guidance to caregivers about their interaction with children and definition of age-appropriate skills.

In addition, Kostelnik *et al.* (2004) note that the DAP framework is only a guide, and not a set of fixed rules for educators to enforce in helping early childhood education to plan for best practices for children. Rather, teachers should use their discretion to interpret and shape children's learning experiences, as this might relate to their early childhood training. On the other hand, Rushton and Larkin (2001:26) regret that there still exists "a discrepancy between what research recommends and how children are currently being taught". The next section provides a brief of the rationale behind interest in early childhood education services around the world**.**

2.5 THE DEMAND FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

"Is there any part of a person's thought and feeling, knowledge, and ability, which does not have its deepest roots in childhood, any aspect of his future education which does not originate there?" (Froebel, in Lilley, 1967:87).

2.5.1 INTRODUCTION

This section addresses the existence of early childhood education provision and the role it plays for society in general, and for families and children in particular. Social, economical and political reasons motivate investment in ECE. This provides insight into some of the dynamics of children's educational experiences as observed in the study, together with social factors cited by teachers as influencing their beliefs. In Africa, as in the rest of the World, there is increased concern among governments to strengthen their education systems, and to develop a prospective human resource base by strengthening early childhood and care programs (Pence & Marfo, 2008:79; Prochner & Kabiru, 2008:125; UNESCO, 2003). Action frameworks are provided for in documents such as Conventions on the rights of the child (CRC, 1990), World Summit for Children (1990), the Dakar Framework, Education for all (2000), and the Millennium Development Goals (2000) frameworks. Principles from these declarations guide governments' policies in developing a strong human resource base (Prochner & Kabiru, 2008:125). Nevertheless, the question arises as to why there has been such an increase in apparent interest in children amongst international bodies.

The World Bank Early Childhood Development cited some benefits to be derived from investing in early childhood education, for instance improved nutrition and health, higher

intelligence, higher school enrolment, less repetition, fewer drop-outs, help for the disadvantaged and long-term cost savings to society (Penn, 2008:384). As indicated, there are social, economic and political benefits that motivate societies to invest in early childhood education (Pence & Marfo, 2008:79; Prochner & Kabiru, 2008:125; UNESCO, 2003).

In the following section, I examine some of the social economic and political dimensions, to provide a perspective of the dynamic nature of ECE perception, and use of the service, besides an appreciation of the various stockholders' values that influence teachers' beliefs and practices. Two perspectives guide the discussion in this section, namely first is the combined social, economic and political dynamics, and second is the academic role of early childhood development. I explore both perspectives in the following section.

2.5.2   PRESCHOOL PROVISION: THE SOCIAL, POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC DYNAMICS

Over the years, in many parts of the world, particularly in the 21st century, ECE continues to play diverse roles for both children and parents. These include providing custodial, alternative quality care for children as their mothers engage in full-time employment (American Academy of Paediatrics, 2005:187; Anme & Segal, 2004:345; Belsky, 2006:97-98; Republic of Kenya, 1998a; Morrison, 2006:216; Penn, 2000:7). In many parts of the world, interest in and growth of ECDE is influenced by as diverse factors as the economy, rural-urban migration, a growing number of roles for mothers, a rise in female- headed households, and a growing demand for formal education (McMullen *et al.*, 2005; Morrison, 2006:216; Penn, 2000:7; Republic of Kenya, 1998a).

The 'early intervention or 'early start' theory postulates that children who participate in ECDE programmes benefit in their cognitive and social development, as they also get better chances at school and even later. In particular, this 'early start' theory might be beneficial for children from disadvantaged backgrounds who enter school with lower foundational skills in language, reading and mathematics (Barbarin *et al.*, cited in NAEYC, 2009:2). Although it remains controversial, investment in ECDE premised on the early intervention theory (Penn *et al.*; Penn & Lloyd, both in Penn, 2008:382) can ameliorate the consequences that children from disadvantaged backgrounds might suffer later in school life. Children with special needs and the girl-child might also benefit from

ECDE (Republic of Kenya & UNESCO, 2005; Republic of Kenya, 2006b:3; Republic of Kenya, 2007:2005; NAEYC, 1997; 2009; Stipek, Feiler, Daniels, & Milburn, 1995). The promise of a better human resource base, with a better foundation laid in early childhood, might have reinforced renewed interest by American corporate organisations, such as *IBM*, *AT&T* and *American Business Corporation*, as 'visible' financiers of early childhood programmes in America (NAEYC, 2008). Corporate America has had an increasing interest in ECE:

> There is a growing concern among corporate bodies and businesses about the quality of American workforce and the use of early childhood education as promise to develop a literate workforce. Many preschool programs include work-related schedules in the program, seen as critically important in inculcating responsibility and trustworthiness, skills of which preschool education is seen to develop early in an individual's life (Morrison, 2006:215).

Aside from linking ECDE to human resource development, in Kenya the need to invest in ECE is no less urgent. Some social factors cited for the need for preschools include the declining number of extended family links that traditionally provided childcare services (Prochner & Kabiru, 2008). This decline arose from urbanization that has created social and geographical distance among families and the need by extended family members and the community members to engage in commercial activities (Republic of Kenya & UNESCO, 2005:17). Therefore, by embracing ECDE early intervention theory, governments aim to lower problems such as truancy, drug abuse, violence and dropping out of school (Morrison, 2006:216), and to inculcate high moral standards in children (Republic of Kenya, 2006b:4). Besides the aforementioned reasons, the value of early childhood services continues to increase, not only as part of school transition, but also as an alternative childcare support (Republic of Kenya, 1998a; UNICEF, 1998; Swadener, 1995).

2.5.3   THE ACADEMIC ROLE OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

> The perspective of the child incorporates the view of the teacher as someone who listens, guides, supports, challenges, and focuses children's attention on learning opportunities and learning (Samuelsson, 2006:102).

The following section highlights the increasing trend to make learning in ECE formal, focusing on academic skills attainment and direct instructional models (Fromberg, 2007:467-468), also called teacher-directed, standards-based learning, direct teaching, and skills-based learning (Goldstein, 2007b; 2008). In addition to the social, economic and political reasons for increased use of ECE services already cited, early stimulation appears to have positive effects on the children's brain development, in addition to better social and emotional functioning (Belsky, 2006:106; Fromberg, 2007:467; Goodman & Sianesi, 2005:536; National Institute of Child Health and Human Development {NICHD}, 2003:1464; Stipek *et al.*, 1995:220). Closely linked to the cognitive benefits view is the 'early start' to school success belief that children enrolled in preschools are likely to succeed in school and in life, already discussed (Fromberg, 2007:467; Penn, 2008:384; Republic of Kenya, 2006b:3; Morrison, 2006:124; NAEYC, 1997; 2009). All these benefits have continued to make ECDE services attractive.

The 'early start to life' belief has influenced policy developments in USA, stressing on the need to break the poverty cycle through school success among children from poor backgrounds (Monighan-Nourot, 2005:23; Morrison, 2006:124). This continues to affect preschool policy and practice in the USA (Goldstein, 2008:253), and beyond (Jambunathan & Caulfield 2006; McMullen *et al.*, 2005). In addition, another American early childhood policy with political backing, the "No Child Left Behind" legislation (NCLB, 2001), mandated state assessment by 2003, and might have influenced preschool practices, especially those relating to pedagogy and the role of assessment (Goldstein, 2008; NAEYC, 2009). In this plan, schools needed to demonstrate that children whose first language was not English had gained proficiency, and they were assessed annually for oral language, reading and writing skills in English (Warner & Sower, 2005:209). These trends are significant, because ideas travel through written documents and conferences to influence ECE around the world (McMullen *et al.*, 2005:453). For example, the early intervention theory reflects in the policy framework on early childhood development in Kenya. One of the statements from the guideline notes:

> When children with special needs and those from disadvantaged backgrounds are exposed to stimulating early childhood development experiences, their placement, retention and academic performance are enhanced. This means that they are more likely to enter[school] at the right time, and complete school successfully, get better paying jobs and therefore live higher quality lives (Republic of Kenya, 2006b:3).

In addition to the early intervention rationale, to reflect the influence of assessment policies, children in preschool as young as four in some countries take formal paper-and-pen lessons (Jambunathan & Caulfield, 2006:256; Hsieh, in McMullen *et al.*, 2005:453; Miller, 2005:257; Palmer, 2005:26; Bagdi, 2004:203; Wesley & Buysse, 2003:351; Frost, 2003:30; Kluger & Park, 2001:50). There appears to be an increasing global trend for early childhood education and development to emphasize cognitive and language development in preparation for formal schooling (Fromberg, 2007:467; Maccoby & Lewis, 2003:1074; Miller, 2005:257; Monighan-Nourot, 2005:28-29; Morrison, 2006:223, 251; Moyles, 2001:81; Neuman, 2005:191; Palmer, 2005:26; Warner & Sower, 2005:2; Swadener, 1995). Moreover, teachers appear to emphasize learning areas that the wider society value (Jambunathan & Caulfield, 2006:256; McMullen *et al.*, 2005:454; Miller & Smith, 2004:131).

Segregating domains of child development might have led to '*academising*' (my term, already defined in the terminology section in the first voyage), or what Neuman (2005:191) calls '*schoolification*'. For example, the early childhood standards' guidelines[19] for preschool education in Kenya, acknowledge the 'cognitive emphasis' trend, as it warns that 'primary 1 and 11 syllabuses shall not be used in ECD centres in the country' (Republic of Kenya, 2006a:14). Where social values do not reflect an holistic approach to child development, emphasis might negate the principles of child-centred activities through play and intentional activities that focus on the whole child (Kostelnik *et al.*, 2004:41-2, 46; Samuelsson & Johansson, 2006; Montessori, 1920; Froebel, 1899).

From these reviews, there seems to be a prominent cognitive demand by stakeholders in ECD to prepare children for school transition, other than child-care provision. Therefore, the result might be a global trend towards development of children that emphasizes the teaching of academic skills, using didactic methods that "drill and kill", at the expense of holistic child development, that include other domains such as social and emotional development (Stipek, 2007:741). Stipek (2007:743) observes that "ironically to achieve high academic standards, we need to be more, not less, concerned about the non-academic aspects of child development".

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[19]   This is the document developed to guide ECE provision in Kenya.

As part of focusing on the 'whole child philosophy', early childhood provision prepares children for school transition, as well as providing government with an incentive to focus on health, and social and economic services for families (Morrison, 2006:216). These appear to be the motivation for ECE services for many families, government and organisations interested in the welfare of children.

2.5.4   A SUMMARY ON THE INTEREST IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

The global trend indicates a rise in the use of early childhood education-triggered social, political and economic factors. The social, economic and political, plus equity concerns, affect the development, provision and focus of a preschool curriculum. These various motivations, which also involve stakeholder values, vary by context and focus. Some of these benefits motivate the development of preschool education in Kenya. However, preschool services, which tend to emphasize formal learning, are more prevalent in towns than in rural areas, where some children do not even attend preschool prior to joining primary school (Republic of Kenya & UNESCO, 2005:33). Regardless, children within the age range of three-to-five benefit through ECD services (about 35% according to MOEST statistics, quoted in Republic of Kenya and UNESCO, 2005:12, and continuing to increase). In the following section, I review ECE in Kenya so as to provide a perspective on the factors that influence provision and insight into data interpretation and discussion which follow in subsequent voyages.

2.6   PRESCHOOL EDUCATION PROVISION IN KENYA

At independence, the Government of Kenya recognized that education was the basic tool for human resources development, improving the quality of life and cultivating nationalistic values (Republic of Kenya, Vision 2030).

2.6.1   A BRIEF HISTORY OF PRESCHOOL EDUCATION IN KENYA

The historical developmental of ECE in Kenya dates back to the 1940s, during pre-independence days, when the British colonialists established day care centres to provide education for European and Asian settlers' children. During the same period, the colonial government established schools to cater for the needs of Kenyan labourers' children living on tea, coffee and sugar plantations (Adams & Swadener, 2000:388;

Kanogo in Mbugua, 2004:192; Republic of Kenya & UNESCO, 2005:17; Prochner & Kabiru, 2008:127). Preschools then served a custodial rather than an academic need (Kabiru, *et al.*, in Mbugua, 2004:192; Prochner & Kabiru, 2008:127).

In 1954, UNICEF initiated a partnership to support ECE in Kenya, with the objective of supporting the health needs of mother and child (UNICEF in Mbugua, 2004:193). Soon after independence in 1964, the Ominde Commission of 1964 proposed a link between early childhood and primary education as part of preparatory stage for primary education, (Mbugua, 2004:193). Consequently, guided by the '*Harambee'* philosophy (translated from Kiswahili as *lets pull together*), preschool education has continued to expand through community partnerships and mobilisation of resources (Adams & Swadener, 2000; Biersteker *et al.*, 2008:232; Prochner & Kabiru, 2008:127; Swadener *et al.*, 2008:411).

The impetus for these partnerships increased in the 1970s, when the government entered into partnerships with non-governmental organisations (NGOs), parastatal bodies, religious organisations, the Bernard Van Leer Foundation, the Aga Khan Foundation and UNICEF (Mbugua, 2004:194). Significantly, emerging from these partnerships, especially between the Multi-National Bernard Van Leer Foundation and the Kenya government, was a 10-year preschool education project initiated in 1972, and the establishment of National Centre for Early childhood Education (NACECE) in 1974 (Republic of Kenya & UNICEF, 2005:17; Mbugua, 2004:195). This marked the genesis of a coordinated ECE program throughout the country (Adams & Swadener, 2000).

Such partnerships have played a significant role in the development and expansion of ECD in Kenya. An examination of its objectives indicates it derives noticeably from the principles of child development and in turn a DAP framework (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997; NACECE, 1999:V; Republic of Kenya, 2006a:2-3; 14-5; Swadener *et al.*, 2008:414).

2.6.2   KENYA: POLICIES ON EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND DEVELOPMENT

> "The vision for the education sector for 2030 is to, "have globally competitive quality education, training and research for sustainable development" (Republic of Kenya, 2007:97)

Kenya has many policy documents that mention the role of ECDE in the overall framework for meeting its education objectives. These include *Kenya Vision 2030*, which has a framework that links education goals to other sectors of life, and aims to "increase GER ECDE by 50 per cent", besides incorporating ECE into primary school learning, as a means to "strengthen early childhood education and thereby lay a solid foundation for the country's overall education and training" (Republic of Kenya, 2007:101).

According to the Kenyan "*Master Plan on Education and Training for the period 1997-2010*", in Kenya as in the rest of the world, ECDE is an area that requires re-emphasis, particularly because of the factors that have necessitated the development of ECD centres. The economy, rural-urban migration, growing multiple roles for mothers, rise in female- headed households, and the demand for formal education continue to influence growth of ECDs (McMullen *et al.*, 2005; Morrison, 2006:216; Penn, 2000:7; Republic of Kenya, 1998). Kenya has also continued to participate, and to sign internationally driven frameworks mentioned earlier to ensure that children remain part of the national and international agenda. Kenya is signatory to the 1989 United Nations CRC. According to this convention, every child has a right to access education, with Article 28 declaring that, "all children have a right to free education and should be protected from neglect, cruelty and exploitation" (CRC, 1990:8). In addition to embracing such a commitment, the Kenyan Government also signed the 1990 African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, and the 2000 Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). In addition, Kenya endorsed the 1990 Jomtien World declaration on Education For All (EFA), followed by the 2000 Dakar World Education Forum, both of which recognize ECD as a holistic approach to child development.

In 2003, Kenya adopted the Universal Primary education (UPE) principles, to make these goals a reality (Republic of Kenya & UNESCO, 2005:16; Republic of Kenya 2006b:4; Republic of Kenya, 2005; 2007). More recently, in 2001, Kenya also enacted into law 'The Children's Act' (Kenya Laws, 2001) to provide a legal framework to the commitment on the rights of the child. Other government policy documents ensure sustainable provisions for the holistic approach to issues affecting children (Republic of Kenya, 2006b:4; Biersteker *et al.*, 2008:232; Swadener *et al.*, 2008:412). Currently, it

has a plan to integrate ECDE into primary schools by 2010 (Kenya in Biersteker *et al.*, 2008:232; Republic of Kenya, 2007:101).

However, despite this strong policy commitment, and a remarkable increase in expansion of ECDE in Kenya since independence, the government has not translated these into practice, in terms of prioritizing and financing ECDE services as part of the commitment to improve children's access to education. Preschool education attendance in some parts of the country remains optional (Biersteker *et al.*, 2008:232; Republic of Kenya, 2006b:16). This has resulted in a "no access policy", and since most of the financing of preschool relies on parents, local communities, NGOs and private individuals (Republic of Kenya & UNESCO, 2005:27), it limits government control over compulsory school attendance. This lack of direct financial support and commitment to ECDE emerged during the implementation of the FPE that excluded ECDE from benefiting from this significant government initiative (Republic of Kenya & UNESCO, 2005:13; Mwaura *et al.*, 2008:238). Summarizing the absence of government financing of ECDE, Republic of Kenya and UNESCO note:

> …in general, the government has been spending very little on ECDE. Costs for ECDE in Kenya are generally borne by parents …[but] the government has been subsidizing the training of preschool teachers through the world Bank funded Kenya ECDE project of 1997-2004 …ECDE in Kenya receives minimal government investment compared with other sub-sectors (2005:16).

The absence of direct government funding at the ECD level might have implications for the implementation of the preschool curriculum. The following section provides an outline of some of the challenges facing ECD in Kenya, providing insight into the data interpretation and the conclusions made. These include supervision and administration of curriculum, and the multi-sectoral partnerships that support ECD programs.

2.6.3   SOME CHALLENGES FACING THE PROVISION OF ECD IN KENYA

The Republic of Kenya (2005:xv) has identified four challenges that need re-emphasis in ECDE, namely a comprehensive policy framework, enhanced access, adequate financing and training of teachers. The following section is a preview of some of these challenges facing ECE provision in Kenya. These are administration and supervision, and the challenges that arise from the multi-sectoral provision. Insight into these challenges

provides a better understanding of the observed practices and emerging teachers' beliefs, as well as a framework to link the data to a bioecological systems theory.

2.6.3.1   Access, policy implementation and supervision of ECD

There are 17,000 public primary schools in the country, with 70 per cent of these having a preschool attached to them. In 2003, there were 28,000 ECD centres, 74 per cent of them linked to a primary school, with an enrolment of 1, 528, 596, children (Kenya in Biersteker *et al.*, 2008:232). The remainder of the preschools operate on private property or in private schools, churches or municipality centres unattached to a primary school. However, one of the Education Sector Strategic Plan (ESSP) objectives of the Kenyan government, yet to be realized, was to integrate preschool education into mainstream basic education programmes by the year 2007 (Republic of Kenya & UNESCO, 2005:20; Republic of Kenya, 2007:101). Such integration might have reduced competition for standard one places, and hence reduce the need for a transition interview.

Currently, there is a tendency for preschool children in some communities to outnumber the primary school vacancies available for them, due to inequitable distribution of resources (Republic of Kenya, 2006b:6; Republic of Kenya & UNESCO, 2005:42). This poses a challenge to the number of children admitted, and the content required for school transition. In most instances, where there is no preschool attached to them, primary schools use interviews to select the children for entry, especially in urban areas (Biersteker *et al.*, 2008:233; Republic of Kenya & UNESCO, 2005:33). For competitive advantage to offer so-called 'quality education', some schools might use interviews to select only what they refer to as 'the best' preschoolers to enrol in their schools. Therefore, a 'perceived good schools' syndrome emerges, in which parents prefer particular schools (Mwaura *et al.*, 2008:238), and this becomes linked to competition and access to 'good' public resources, leaving inadequate resources for quality learning at the currently 'crowded primary schools' (Republic of Kenya, 2007:99-100).

Although the Ministry of Education has an explicit guideline on the standards required for school transition from the preschool to the primary school (Republic of Kenya, 2006a), most preschools appear independent in deciding what and how to teach children (Republic of Kenya & UNESCO, 2005:33). Academically focused assessment continues to benchmark admission to primary schools (Biersteker *et al.*, 2008:234; Republic of

Kenya & UNESCO, 2005:33), which might suggest that adherence to the standards guidance for ECD practices that de-emphasize reading, writing and arithmetic, might have been compromised (Republic of Kenya & UNESCO, 2005:33; Republic of Kenya, 2006a).

The Ministry of education, together with NACECE, recommends a child-centred approach, but this might not reflect the practice in primary schools. The pedagogic strategies at the primary school are teacher-directed, creating a disjuncture between preschool and primary school curriculum which does not embrace a child-centred curriculum (Biersteker *et al.*, 2008:234), and yet supervision is limited due to the heavy workload of supervisors in the field, and irrelevant guidelines provided by the ECD section at the inspectorate (Republic of Kenya & UNESCO, 2005:33-4). Therefore, despite emphasis on a child-centred approach to preschool learning, lack of supervision, and ambiguous guidelines for inspection might compromise effective implementation of the preschool services (Kenya, 2006b:6).

2.6.3.2   The multi-sectoral provision of ECD

As mentioned above, the Kenyan government is seen as strong on policy and short on the direct provision of ECD. Despite any strength of policy, ECE is one area that the Kenyan government, for some time now, has not directly provided (Biersteker *et al.*, 2008:233). Republic of Kenya and UNESCO (2005:41) regret that "the government does not see ECD as a priority … [and] therefore [it] receives little public investment". Instead, it encourages partnerships with other organizations, especially concerning the training of preschool teachers and provision of learning facilities (Republic of Kenya, 2006b:12; Republic of Kenya & UNESCO, 2005:27). Private organisations, local authorities and parents provide ECE for their children or workers, but under the co-ordination of NACECE. At a government level, the provision of other adjunct services such as healthcare, nutrition and health monitoring, incorporate the Ministry of Health. Other partners include municipalities and city councils and the local communities (Adams & Swadener, 2000; Biersteker *et al.*, 2008:233).

The multi-sectoral approach to provision and support of ECD might have its own advantages and disadvantages. It is advantageous because it opens up the development of ECD programmes to partners who include parents, multinational donors, community

partnerships, and various government Ministries (Republic of Kenya & UNESCO, 2005:44). Although such partnerships are important for increasing access to preschool, it introduces divergent and sometimes conflicting expectations for the preschool teacher (Adams & Swadener, 2000), since the multi-sectoral approach empowers many partners that might not clearly stipulate roles, values, and goals (Republic of Kenya & UNESCO, 2005:48). Katz (1995; 1993) advances five perspectives of quality that might differ among stakeholders. Such perspectives might be important for teachers' implementation of the curriculum.

2.6.3.3   Concluding remarks

The history of preschool education in Kenya dates back to pre-independence days, when their role was custodial. The number of preschools has also continued to increase the diversity of roles, with preparation for school transition being prominent. Through the years, preschools have developed from community initiatives, through the above-mentioned 'harambee' spirit as communities have come together to pool resources for infrastructure development. Although the government does not directly fund preschool, but rather invites parents to contribute, it has embraced a partnership policy that involves both local and international partners in developing and supporting ECDE. As partners, parents employ teachers because the government does not have an employment policy for preschool teachers. It is against such a background of dynamic child development, that this study is conceptualized and planned. In the following section, I review some empirical studies that provide insight into the current study.

## 2.7   STUDIES ON PRESCHOOL INTERACTIONS, TEACHERS' BELIEFS AND DAP

"To know the road ahead, ask those coming back" (Chinese proverb).

2.7.1   A GENERAL INTRODUCTION

This section explores the empirical studies related to preschool interactions and DAP principles, and teachers' beliefs to provide insight into the topic. Broad areas covered include teachers' beliefs and classroom practices, beliefs and education level, beliefs and

cultural variation and beliefs and grade level variation. Figure 4 (below) summarizes this section.
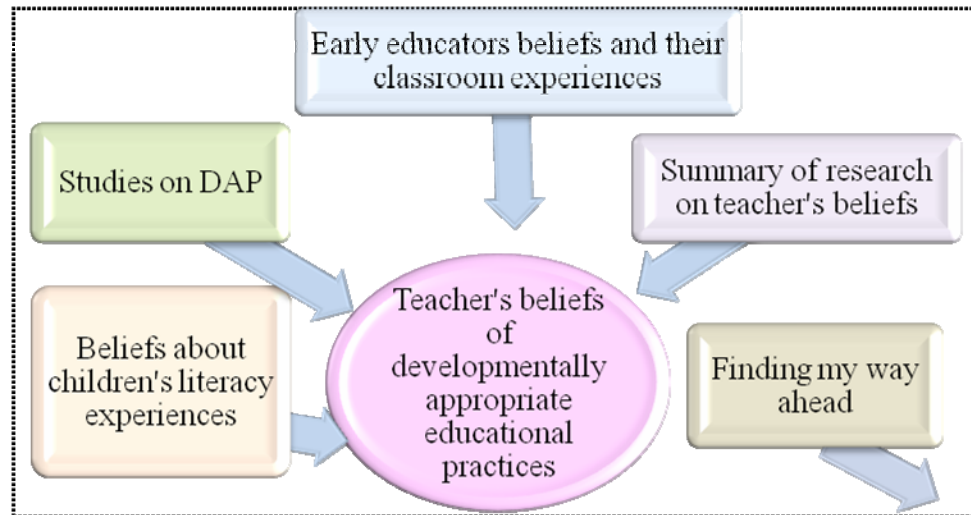
FIGURE 4:   Summary of the review of empirical studies

2.7.2   STUDIES ON DEVELOPMENTALLY APPROPRIATE PRACTICES

This section is a review of empirical studies related to DAP or aspects of the use of developmentally appropriate practices. In addition, it explores some studies related to child-centred approaches as closely aligned to DAP. This might provide insight into my secondary focus on preschool children's educational experiences explored in my study. Although this might not be an exhaustive review of DAP belief and practices and studies that relate to it, it does provide insight on research about DAP. Therefore, the literature review focuses on the latest studies, such as those of Wang *et al.*, (2008), Goldstein (2007a, b), Jambunathan and Caulfield (2006), Lee (2006), Parker and Neuharth-Pritchett (2006), McMullen *et al.*, (2005), Li (2003), McMullen and Alat (2002), Cassidy and Lawrence (2000), and McMullen (1999), among others. In addition, the progenic studies that foreground research into teachers' beliefs and practices framed from a DAP perspective are included, for instance Charlesworth *et al.*, (1993), Kontos and Dunn (1993), Stipek (1993), Stipek and Byler (1997), and Charlesworth (1998).

Goldstein (2007b) examined the way two-kindergarten teachers' balanced holistic approaches to child development with standards requirements for testing. Using participant observations and interviews, Goldstein (2007b) explored which priorities

these teachers chose, finding that they held strong beliefs that supported a holistic approach to child development, despite being aware that the changing expectations for kindergarten introduced some complexity into their practices (Goldstein, 2007b:387). For example, teachers in Goldstein's study felt that some children, who might not have been ready, could have been under pressure to cope with the demands for learning to read and do simple mathematics. In addition, the teachers felt time constraints on managing the kindergarten routine, with more work for children to do and a faster tempo to complete schedules. The teachers used three strategies to accommodate both academic skills and holistic child development, namely integration, demarcation and acquiescence. Integration followed an embedded approach, with both skills and meaningful, child-directed and play-based activities existing simultaneously (Goldstein, 2007b:389). Demarcation involves planning separate schedules for children to engage with skills-based academic content, while at other times they play (Goldstein, 2007b:390). Acquiescence, involves focusing on academic content, which parents might want to see, but only using selected materials that are beneficial to children, to retain DAP framework (Goldstein, 2007b:390).

Goldstein's study provides insight into the strategies teachers can use even as they struggle to create a compromise. It indicates that parents and state testing in the USA are some of the sources of tension for teachers who want to embrace DAP. However, Goldstein was researching two teachers in one school, and it is possible they shared some expectations from the same group of parents. In addition, Goldstein focused observations on teachers' of kindergarten children. My study differs from this because I used videotape[20] and photographs during observation, of four-year-olds and five-year-olds, and in two separate preschool settings, practising two different curricula. Whereas Goldstein (2007a; b) observed white females, all four of the teachers I observed were black females. Because of social determinants, parents' expectations might vary by community. For instance, teachers working in one setting might share similar expectations, or even teaching approaches. The age of the children, as well as the level of teachers' education and experience, all differ from those of my participants, and so might reasonably be expected to produce different results.

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[20]   See chapter three for details of how I used visual elicitation to access teachers' beliefs during teachers' interviews.

The conclusion by Goldstein (2007b) that teachers used one of three approaches, which can accommodate both DAP and standards skills requirements, seems to reflect the findings by Kim *et al.* (2005:51). The latter explored kindergarten and childcare centre teachers' perceptions and use of DAP practices, in a quantitative study of 211 kindergarten teachers and 208 childcare centre teachers in Korea. Kindergarten teachers had either a college degree or certification through child development training (Kim *et al.*, 2005:51). They found that early childhood teachers' self-reported beliefs were developmentally appropriate and reported utilising DAP, although their self-reported DAP activities had a low score (Kim *et al.*, 2005:54). The researchers concluded that the childcare workers tended to reflect both DAP and DIP, (defined in the first voyage) activities, showing that in any class there might be a blend of both practices used. This reflects on the conclusions by other scholars that rather than view DAP as an either/or practice, it is possible to view it within a continuum (Charlesworth *et al.*, 1993; Kontos & Dunn, 1993, Kostelnik *et al.*, 2004:33-39; Parker & Neuharth, 2006). Overall, beliefs in the Kim *et al.* study of DAP tended to score higher than the actual practice. However, its applicability to my study is treated with caution since the study utilised self-reported beliefs in a quantified approach, and these might be inherently subjective.

However, the findings of Kim *et al.* (2005) may be useful to my study in other ways, because they do show various perspectives held by different groups in relation to the use of DAP, as well as indicating that beliefs tend to be higher than practice, even in studies that do not make actual observations. It also highlights some constraints that teachers and caregivers face in implementing the DAP curriculum, such as lack of autonomy to develop curriculum and to select instructional strategies to use in the classroom; influences from the national curriculum; their centres' philosophy; parents' needs; and the policies of the local districts (Kim *et al.*, 2005:55). Their study also reflects earlier conclusions in the study of Charlesworth *et al.* (1993), that teachers using DAP felt that they had more control over planning and implementing instructional activities than did teachers using less appropriate strategies.

Charlesworth *et al.* (1993) sought to identify DAP and DIP beliefs of principles and kindergarten teachers in relation to their classroom practices in the USA, using a questionnaire and a Likert scale. The findings indicated congruence between beliefs and practices, although the belief on DAP was stronger than practice. Overall, the more

DAP-oriented the teachers, the more they were likely to provide DAP-related activities. Beliefs about DIP reflected an even stronger predisposition to provide DIP-related activities. Therefore, it appears from this study that individuals act according to their beliefs. The researchers noted that DAP-oriented teachers felt they had more control to plan and to implement instructional activities than did teachers using less appropriate strategies. They also report that children attending DIP classrooms experienced more stress than did their DAP counterparts. In DAP classrooms, Charlesworth *et al.* (1993) observed centre-based, group activity, whole group activity and music activities, while in the DIP-related classes, teacher-directed small groups, workbooks and worksheets, waiting, punishment and transitions, prevailed. Testing appeared to stress children, and in a follow-up study among children in the primary grades, those who attended the DAP kindergartens exhibited less negative behaviour and better work-study habits than did the DIP kindergarten children (Charlesworth, *et al.*, 1993:18-19).

Whilst Charlesworth *et al.* (1993:23) concluded that DAP is a highly contentious framework, ECE practitioners can use it to define, plan classroom activities, in addition to using it to assess programmes. They also cautioned that DAP implementation needs to be flexible if it is to reflect teacher style, and the children's learning styles and cultures (Charlesworth, *et al.*, 1993:23). This is in agreement with later scholars, who advocated sensitivity to individual differences (Kostelnik *et al.*, 2004; Jalongo *et al.*, 2004; Jalongo, 2007; Jambunathan & Caulfield, 2006; Stipek, 2007). An important caveat is that this research was conceptualised when the relationship between DAP and DIP was still being conceptualised separately as either DAP or DIP, as opposed to the current trend of embracing continuity between the two approaches (Charlesworth *et al.*, 1993; Goldstein, 2008; Kontos & Dunn, 1993; Kostelnik *et al.*, 2004). Some studies now identify benefits such as letter recognition and reading achievement of didactic instruction for children from disadvantaged backgrounds (Stipek, 2004; Stipek *et al.*, 1995), and children learn some skills, such as how to follow directions, through the telling approach that combines with modelling (Kostelnik *et al.*, 2004:79; Stipek, 2007).

It appears, however, that some teachers prefer teacher-directed approaches. For example, Zeng and Zeng (2005:710) conducted a study to establish the trend of developmentally and culturally inappropriate programmes in the USA, from a probability sample of 3,047 kindergarten teachers and 866 administrators. They surveyed teachers' self-reported

beliefs and practices, teacher qualification and administrator qualification. Apart from assessing teacher qualifications, teaching experiences and educational background, they also assessed teacher belief variables, such as in-class activities, evaluation methods, classroom organisation and views on kindergarten readiness. Administrator qualifications included teaching experiences, educational background and their specialized training and certifications. It was found that they valued teacher-directed activities such as formal reading and maths instruction, ability to follow instructions, attentiveness in class and minimal disruption. Teachers also felt that national standards should apply to children's assessment, with more emphasis on English proficiency as part of school readiness. However, some teachers felt that pressure from parents constrained their freedom to implement the curriculum (Zeng & Zeng, 2005:716).

Although their study may be relevant to mine, in so far as it identified some sources of pressure that inhibit teacher freedom to implement a child-centred curriculum, since Zeng and Zeng (2005) captured self-reported beliefs in a quantitative approach, it is prone to participant bias. This is a shortcoming because a questionnaire used to capture beliefs does not facilitate probing for deeper understanding. The current study seeks to overcome, through observations and visual-elicited interviews, the weaknesses associated with quantitative approaches that assess beliefs. Zeng and Zeng (2005) concluded that developmentally inappropriate practices were prevalent in the kindergartens they studied in the USA. Jambunathan and Caulfield (2006) made a similar observation about the prevalence of inappropriate practices in an Indian study.

After assessing twenty-one early childhood classrooms, Jambunathan and Caulfield (2006) concluded that kindergartens teachers did not apply DAP in their study context in India, perhaps as a reflection of the Indian values that emphasize didactic teaching over creativity and independent thinking (2006:255). Using a Likert scale, they explored four categories of DAP: creating a caring community of learners; teaching to enhance development and learning; constructing appropriate curriculum; assessing children's learning and development, and having reciprocal relationships between families and their children. The study observed diverse classrooms with lower kindergartens attended by three-year-old children, and upper kindergarten with four-year-olds, located in diverse settings, such as elementary school and secondary school. Each class observed had between 21 and 25 children, with a full-time teacher and an aide. All the teachers had

bachelor's degrees, while the teacher aides had no degrees. Some of the DIP practices they noted were fewer opportunities for children to interact with materials or with paper and pencil, as well as content-based assessments that did not consider each child's individual abilities (Jambunathan & Caulfield, 2006:255). In the study context, the state organization and central organization that sets the curriculum seemed to have more authority over the curriculum than did the teachers.

The relevance of Jambunathan and Caulfield's study (2006) is that it provides insight into the extent of DAP use in an Indian context (that of a developing country, similar to Kenya), particularly the sensitivity of DAP to cultural values and the role of central authority in the teachers' use of DAP. Nevertheless, Jambunathan and Caulfield (2006) studied teachers qualified with bachelor's degrees, assisted by teacher aides as they interacted with children between ages three and four. It differs from the current study, in which teachers had certificate qualifications in early childhood education, were interacting with three-, four- and five-year-old children without teachers' aides. Previous research has demonstrated that the qualification held by teachers affects their beliefs about DAP and the way they interact with children (McMullen & Alat, 2002; McMullen, 1999; Wang *et al.*, 2008:245). Moreover, the attachment of the Kindergartens to the elementary schools and secondary schools might have influenced the kindergarten teachers in their interaction with the children. Overall, the use of a Likert scale by Jambunathan and Caulfield (2006), to assess DAP use in the Indian classrooms, has limitations because it does not access the reasons for the decisions taken by the teachers to use the approaches observed. The current study improves on this methodological limitation by including visually elicited interviews to supplement observed practices for more insight. Jambunathan and Caulfield (2006) concluded that context expectations and values, such as the valuing of community over individualism, might vary the approach used by the teachers and highlight cultural variation inherent in the use of DAP.

Emerging from this review is that there are both similarities and differences between countries in teachers' self-reported beliefs and their self-reported DAP practices. McMullen *et al.* (2005) have noted this variation following exploration of the commonalities held by caregivers and teachers of three- to five-year-old children in the USA, China, Taiwan, Korea and Turkey. The studies concerned self-reported beliefs and self reported practices related to the NAEYC's policy statement for developmentally

appropriate practices. They used a survey to collect data in each of these countries, using a number of different sampling methods. Quantitative results showed similarities related to beliefs and practices associated with integrating across the curriculum, supporting social and emotional development, providing opportunities for interaction with materials and flexibility of choice in the curriculum. Further, self-reported beliefs associated with DAP were positively correlated to self-reported frequency of engagement in preschool activities related to the philosophy in all the five countries, but strongest in the USA and weakest in China. McMullen *et al.*'s (2005) study adds value to the relationship between teachers' beliefs and their self-reported practices across contexts, and it highlights possible disparities between the beliefs and practices of teachers based on their being in different countries. However, a qualitative approach, as applied in the current study, using actual classroom observation, might yield different results as compared to the limitations associated with self-reported questionnaires, open as they are to reporter bias (Stipek, 2004:561; Vartuli, 1999:507, Zeng & Zeng, 2005:718).

The study of McMullen *et al.* 92005) also reflects on how teachers' beliefs might vary by context, depending on the cultural expectations. This conclusion is similar to that of Wang *et al.* (2008), who explored the consistency of Chinese preschool teachers' beliefs, and compared them with their American counterparts. In addition, they looked into the role of personal, professional and socio-cultural characteristics in the teachers' curricula beliefs. Participating were 296 Chinese teachers and 146 American teachers, who completed the Teacher Beliefs Scale in addition to supplying their background information. Besides interviews, Chinese teachers supplied information on their instructional activities using the instructional activities scale. From each sample, 10 teachers participated in an in-depth interview. The findings indicated moderate and consistent links between preschool teachers' beliefs and self-reported practices (Wang *et al.*, 2008:243). Teachers in both contexts held similar conceptions about early teaching concerning child-initiated curriculum, teacher-directed instruction of academic skills and integrated curriculum. However, the teachers in each context seemed to differ in the extent to which they endorsed particular beliefs. For example, Chinese teachers were likely to endorse teacher-directed, academic skills-oriented beliefs, in contrast to their American counterparts, whose beliefs were less formal, less structured and more child-initiated oriented (Wang *et al.*, 2008:245). In addition, contextual factors in China, such as location of school, whether rural or urban, and class size, seemed to affect teachers'

beliefs. The researchers concluded that Chinese urban teachers who appeared to endorse child-initiated learning had more access to Western influences than did their rural counterparts. Such varied exposure might also have influenced their beliefs. In addition, teachers with high levels of education appeared to endorse child-centred beliefs more than teacher-directed practices (Wang *et al.*, 2008:245), reflecting conclusions by other scholars that education influences teachers' beliefs (McMullen & Alat, 2002; McMullen, 1999).

Wang *et al.* (2008) study adds to knowledge on cross-cultural differences among teachers' beliefs about early childhood curriculum. In addition, it provides information about factors that are likely to influence teachers' beliefs such as the location of school, level of teacher education, among other contextual variables that might affect teachers' beliefs. However, since this study focused on early childhood curriculum, it does not delve into the nature of children's educational experiences, as premised on the current study. Moreover, the use of a self-reported teacher instructional scale to capture teacher practices might not reflect actual practices as might be observed in an actual classroom interaction process. As there were contextual differences among Chinese and American teachers in their beliefs, the present study might also yield differences in beliefs, because 'teachers' beliefs are situationally related' (Wang *et al.*, 2008:244).

The highest level of education and the self-reported DAP beliefs of early caregivers according are related, according to a study by McMullen and Alat (2002). Their quantitative study examined 151 early childhood caregivers and teachers enrolled from a variety of early childhood settings which included family care homes, childcare centres, headstart centres, registered ministries connected with churches, synagogues, elementary school programs and Montessori preschool programs. This study contributes to our understanding of the contribution of level of teacher education to their self-reported DAP beliefs (McMullen & Alat, 2002; Wang *et al.*, 2008:245; Wilcox-Herzog, 2002). However, the issue of DAP might be more complex, with context-related variations and expectations for children (Klein & Chen, 2001:31; Koops, 2004:13; Nutbrown, 2006:25; Penn, 2000:9; Penn, in Robinson & Diaz, 2006:59; Warner & Sower, 2005:24). Besides, this study included a variety of contexts, besides centre-based care. The dynamics related to contexts might influence teachers' beliefs. It might also be reasonable to assume that the teachers' level of education might predispose them to respond in a certain way

(Wilcox-Herzog & Ward, 2004; Wilcox-Herzog, 2002:84), besides a possibility of engaging in response-set. As mentioned earlier, the limitations inherent in the exclusive use of a self-reported Likert scale (Stipek, 2004:561; Vartuli, 1999:507; Zeng & Zeng, 2005:718), is prone to participant bias.

Stipek (1993) reviewed studies on the effects of different early childhood curriculum approaches on children's achievement and motivation, noting that child-centred preschools aligned closely to recommendations for DAP, while those regarded as didactic emphasized academic skills, reflecting similar observations by Charlesworth *et al.* (1993). Although direct instruction might accelerate children's acquisition of reading related skills, but not for mathematical skills, the tasks children engaged in did not seem connected to their personal meaningful experiences, as they spent more time reciting the alphabet, counting and copying letters (Stipek, 1993:37). Stipek (1993) concluded that both of these approaches had positive effects on children. The didactic approach seemed useful in teaching children reading, letter and word recognition skills, while the child-centred approach was superior in math skills. Their results showed that academics skills oriented preschools were associated with negative social climate, an observation confirmed in a later study by Miles and Stipek (2006) that positive social skills had a positive relationship with literacy skills at kindergarten and at first grade. However, children in child-centred classes were less associated with negative behaviour (Stipek, 1993:48), perhaps because teachers in child-centred classrooms might embrace sensitivity to learner needs, with more interest in the learner, their working style and sensitivity to the context. This contrasts with teacher-directed methods that might focus to meet certain standards (Brown, 2003:50), or taking the 'factory approach' designed to 'optimize efficiency through regimented processes' (Thompson, in Brown, 2003:51). Besides, teachers in learner centred classrooms might focus on nurturing the children's emotions as Kontos and Dunn (1993) report in their study.

Kontos and Dunn (1993) report their findings of caregiver practices and beliefs in childcare that had varying levels of DAP. In a quantitative study in one of the USA states, they found that caregiver's beliefs and practices appeared to be inconsistent. Besides, caregivers appeared more concerned with guidance of children's behaviour than facilitating their play. This study focused on 30 daycare classrooms, with an adult-child-ratio was 1:12. The head from each classroom, qualified with a college level childcare education participated (Kontos & Dunn, 1993:58). The findings of this study revealed

that programs can fit into a continuum DAP, ranging from teacher-directed, child-centred or a mix of both (Kontos & Dunn, 1993:71) in reflecting a similar finding by Stipek (in Stipek, 1997). Quoting the Citadel, Henson (2003:6) offers some of the characteristics that distinguish learner-centred considerations; learner characteristics inherent in their history, culture, interests and beliefs, the individuality of learners, learning as a process with relevance and value to the learner, environments with positive interpersonal relationships, and learning that occurs as a natural process that reinforces learner interest in their experiences. Although Henson's (2003) analysis focuses on higher levels of learning, it might appear that these characteristics equally apply to early childhood classrooms.

Kontos and Dunn (1993) highlight the various levels of play and the roles that caregivers engage with during both play and teacher directed activities. From this study, we learn that classrooms fall in a continuum of DAP, rather than focusing on presence or absence of DAP. However, this quantitative study focused on caregiver interaction styles rather than educational experiences that my study endeavours. In addition, the study does not describe the age of the children, apart from the fact that they were in preschool, which makes it difficult to infer how the age of the children might have influenced educators interaction styles. In conclusion, even when teachers understand the significance of play in early childhood they may not understand how to behave during children's free play (Kontos & Dunn, 1993:71). This study might suggest that the presence of knowledge about childcare may not always translate to effective interaction skills.

In a study similar to mine, Phillips (2004) reports the results of the beliefs and practices among five Caucasian female kindergarten teachers teaching in a rural school district in the United States. From this study, I gleaned the possible levels of analysis of practices such as type of assessment approach used by the teacher and the teaching strategy. Besides, the study also observes that parents and other teachers affect the teaching approach used by these teachers.

However, the focus of Phillips (2004) study explored, using non-participant observations and interviews, beliefs of early childhood educators about the role of kindergarten, how teachers' viewed DAP, beliefs about how children develop and learn, instructional practices used, and the elements that influence teachers' program designs. All the teachers in the study but one, in Phillips (2004) study had at least a Masters degree in

reading, general education, curriculum and supervision, all working in a single public school. In addition, three of these teachers had previous experience as first or second grade teachers, which might have influenced both their beliefs and teaching experiences, besides working in environment endowed with learning materials (as reflected by the description of the research context). Preschools in affluent societies have better resources and more equipped as compared to those in developing countries (Smidt, 2007:63).

In contrast, my study focused on teachers' beliefs about developmentally appropriate educational practices, based on children's experiences and using five constructs that also reflect my analysis approach. In addition, my study is of four teachers working in two different settings, with certificate qualifications in early childhood education. As mentioned above, other studies have connected educators' qualifications and their practices (McMullen & Alat, 2002; McMullen, 1999). Wang *et al.* (2008) also suggest that the location of a school, whether rural or urban, might influence the dynamics of DAP implementation.

Even if the DAP connects to child-centeredness, its interpretation might not reflect a similar approach across contexts, as the following sentiments confirm:

> …as a teacher educator and researcher, there were opportunities to visit schools in England, Scotland, France, Holland, Germany and North and it was intriguing to note that despite significant variations in context, staffing and resources provision, the 'term child-centred' was applied in all these situations. Perplexed by this conundrum, my musings entertained the notion that child-centred teaching had many forms of which were constructed chameleon-like in a variety of setting (Sugrue, 1997:32).

Sugrue's (1997) observation is a diverse interpretation of child-centred teaching (read DAP), which might take different forms in different settings, depending on context variables, such as child-adult ratio. Meanwhile, Phillips' study (2004) indicates that since the educators had volunteers working in the school, plus the high quality-learning environment (as reflected by the play materials), the level of interaction and use of the learning the environment might vary. In the following section, I review studies related to teachers' beliefs and classroom interactions.

2.7.3   EARLY EDUCATORS' BELIEFS AND THEIR CLASSROOM PRACTICES

Research has documented a broad range of teachers' beliefs and their practices. These include beliefs and education level (McMullen & Alat, 2002; McMullen, 1999), beliefs and child-centred approaches (Lee, 2006; Stipek, 1993; Winsler & Carlton, 2003) and the consistency of beliefs and practices (Wang *et al.*, 2008). In addition, studies exist that document beliefs and practices across five countries (McMullen *et al.*, 2005), factors shaping beliefs and practices (Parker & Neuharth-Pritchett, 2006), beliefs about top-down curriculum implementation (Wong, 2003), and how beliefs and practices vary across grade (Stipek & Byler, 1997). These are some of the studies reviewed in the following section.

Li (2003) investigated the perceptions of teaching and learning held by nine kindergarten teachers in Hong Kong, using a one-hour tape-recorded, unstructured interview, later analysed qualitatively. These teachers, drawn from three schools in diverse backgrounds and locations had experience ranging from nine months to eight years. This study revealed a contrasting image of the role of a teacher espoused in the philosophy of early childhood, based on the DAP framework. Teachers in Li's (2003) study emphasized order and schedules in the delivery of teaching, focusing on instruction, planning, preparation and external judgment as measures of good teaching. They assessed their own success rather than those of their learners (Li, 2003:20). Teachers valued children's assignments related to cognitive outcomes, over their social, moral, aesthetic, physical development, and children's enjoyment of the day. These Chinese teachers ignored opportunities for children to engage with self-talk as part of free play, which implies that teachers did not consider it a priority in their teaching. Moreover, teachers' years of teaching experience did not seem to vary their definition of good teaching, contradicting the findings of Vartuli (1999). Li (2003) concludes that, due to teachers' perceived time constraints, they focused on completing the scheduled activities more than they did on the pedagogic process. Kindergarten teachers' images of a good teacher emphasizes the important areas that concern them, and which they might reinforce (Li, 2003). However, it is difficult to interpret these results any more clearly, because little information is available about the children with whom the teachers interacted. Given this limitation, it might not be possible to identify a range of other possible preschool activities that sometimes could vary with age, hence influencing teacher judgment of what is 'good'. For example, Stipek and Byler (1997) demonstrate teachers' judgement and their beliefs might vary by grade level.

In their study in the USA, Stipek and Byler (1997:310) compared 60 preschool kindergarten and first grade teachers, for a range of factors that might influence their beliefs on how preschoolers, kindergarten and first graders learn. They also explored these teachers' interpretations of policies related to school entry, testing, and retention, as well as their satisfaction with expected practices, pressures for change, and their experiences. Schools with diverse resources and social backgrounds participated in the study. An observation scale assessing the actual classroom interaction and a Likert scale measured teacher's beliefs (Stipek & Byler, 1997:310). The results of this study found a coherent set of beliefs among the teachers, corroborating other literature in early childhood education studies (Kim *et al.*, 2005:443; Maxwell *et al.*, 2001:434; McMullen *et al.*, 2005:461). However, Stipek and Byler (1997:314) observed differences based on grade level. Among the three groups in the study, preschool teachers reported more pressure, especially from among parents from low social economic status, to include skills oriented work in their practice (Stipek & Byler, 1997:317).

This study adds significantly to theory about the differences among kindergarten, preschool and grade one teachers in their beliefs, and their practices, besides the link between teaching level and teacher qualification. However, this was a comparative study among kindergarten, preschool and first grade teachers, whose expectations about how children learn might differ, depending on the developmental level of children in their class. Moreover, the qualifications of the participants in the study ranged from a high school diploma to a Master's degree (Stipek & Byler, 1997:310), an inherent difference that might vary the interaction, since education level influences a teacher's beliefs (McMullen & Alat, 2002; Wilcox-Herzog, 2002:84). The observations were limited to an average of two hours-per-class, a limitation that might not have eliminated response-set (Shaughnessy *et al.*, in Cohen *et al.*, 2007:410). A quantitative approach using a Likert scale to measure beliefs might also limit real access to teachers' beliefs that reside deeply in a person's subconscious, and so impossible to capture in a self-reported measure because sometimes teachers tend to engage in response-set, reporting what they think the researcher wants to hear (Vartuli, 1999:508). Therefore, a qualitative approach suggested for the current study might access in depth the factors related to beliefs. Teachers in the current study only hold a certificate in an area of early childhood, in contrast to the higher-level qualification held by teachers in Stipek and Byler's (1997) study, since the

teachers' qualifications appear to influence beliefs (McMullen & Alat, 2002; McMullen, 1999; Wang *et al.*, 2008:245).

Wilcox-Herzog and Ward (2004) concluded from the results of 71 teachers in their study that beliefs are predicative of intentions. These teachers had secured varied certifications (the lowest qualification being a Child Development Associate), and varied experience (with nine years or more experience) teaching three- to five-year-olds. The study used a self-report questionnaire to assess teachers' perceived ability to practice their beliefs and intentions, besides assessing the importance of varying types of interactions with children. Consequently, this study found that a teacher's depth of childcare training related to their intentions (Wilcox-Herzog & Ward, 2004), reflecting a similar finding by other scholars that education matters in teacher beliefs (McMullen & Alat, 2002; McMullen, 1999; Wang *et al.*, 2008:245). Child educators with the least and most training felt that they were interacting with the children, as they should. Interestingly, teacher-aides felt that they were in a better position to practice their beliefs than did teachers.

This study adds to knowledge of the importance of using beliefs to predict intentions. However, the possibility that teacher-aides reported engaging in appropriate behaviour with the children, more-so than did the teachers, demonstrates the different self-perceptions in relation to beliefs and the contradictions that could arise between the time of training and the actual experience. Further, this implies that there are exigent factors between the time of training and the actual professional practice, impeding teacher's ideal professional practices that require further scrutiny. As mentioned above, this study used self-reports, which are prone to response-set. In addition, the study only measured *intentions*, not *practices*. The results would have varied had an actual assessment of the teacher and teacher-aides been done. Although my study does not include teacher-aides, I interview teachers based on children's educational experiences, using in-depth interviews to mitigate the shortcomings of self-reported questionnaires, as this reflects the variations by grade, as Vartuli (1999) concludes.

Vartuli (1999) explored the way the continuum of teachers' beliefs varied across grade level and how those beliefs related to classroom practice among kindergarten, first-, second- and third-grade teachers' beliefs. The study measured self-reported practices, with three different instruments. In the study, 137 educators participated, comprising 18

Voyage 2: Linking with other voyagers in a similar direction

Head Start, 20 kindergartens, 33 first-grade, 33 second-grade and 33 third-graders. Teacher education levels varied with the highest having attained a master's degree and certification in elementary education. Vartuli's (1999) study found that teachers' beliefs moderately correlated with observed practices, and supported what teachers reported as their beliefs and practices. However, teachers' self-reported practice and observed practice tended to decrease as the grade level increased. Teachers in the 'head start' and kindergarten classes were more conscientious about developmentally appropriate practices than were teachers in the second and third grades. Further, teachers with less or and more teaching experience, and those with certification in ECE, seemed likely to embrace developmentally appropriate strategies. Vartuli (1999) concluded that teachers' beliefs varied across grade level.

Vartuli (1999) established a correlation between beliefs and classroom practices, among the kindergarten and elementary school teachers, providing the rationale for my study to use beliefs as a basis to explore the practices observed. However, Vartuli's (1999) study compared teachers from kindergarten through to grade three who might have had different expectations for their children, which might in turn determine their classroom experiences because of the developmental differences among children across the classes. These teachers had higher levels of education (up to master's); a characteristic that varies from my current study, where the participating teachers are all certificate-holders working with only preschool children (three-five-year-olds). As a result, it is reasonable to assume that the age-level of the children in a classroom could vary according to the way a teacher interacts with them, hence the results. A teacher's education level could also influence his or her beliefs (McMullen & Alat, 2002; McMullen, 1999; Wang *et al.*, 2008:245), in addition to their style of interaction. Teachers' role-perception and their images of a 'good' teacher might vary according to the skills that they value as important to develop in children, regardless of national standards that support DAP (Li 2003), contrasting the study by Lee (2006).

Preschool teachers ought to embrace pedagogical practices that promote children's holistic development (Lee, 2006:439). To explore 18 preschool teachers' beliefs about appropriate pedagogy for four-year-olds, Lee used teacher-directed and child-centred video-clips to elicit teachers' beliefs. Each of the teachers viewed the clips and later discussed their observations with the researcher. Lee (2006:439) concluded that all the

participating teachers endorsed the belief that the curriculum should draw from children's interests, apart from the need to treat each child as an individual in the learning process, as they learn at their own tempo. Moreover, all teachers in the study subscribed to child-directed classrooms, where children enjoy a sense of freedom in the learning process that should embrace activities that they enjoy (Lee, 2006:435).

Regarding the use of video-elicitation (Harper, 2005:757; 2004:232; 2002:14-15; Pink, 2004:392), a method adopted in my study, Lee's study is useful in highlighting the pedagogic strategies preferred by the teachers, as it embraces the holistic development of children, endorsing child-directed approaches as espoused in the DAP framework (Bredekamp & Copple, 1987; Kostelnik *et al.*, 2004). Child-centred beliefs reported by Lee (2006) resonate with the findings of Parker and Neuharth-Pritchett (2006), who found that even though teachers in their study were under increasing pressure to use teacher-directed approaches, they still subscribed to child-centred pedagogy. Even so, since teachers in Lee's (2006) study endorsed child-directed learning, there is a suggestion that this might not necessarily reflect in their actual practice.

Therefore, although the clips elicited the teachers' beliefs, such beliefs remain hypothetical, since these were only clips, and as such, beliefs derived from watching a clip might not easily translate into practice, given that teaching is a complex process (Cochran-Smith, in Goldstein, 2007a:51; Goldstein, 2007b:382, 396; Parker & Neuharth-Pritchett, 2006:69). Human interaction and decision-making might be much more dynamic and intricate than can be discerned from a video clip. In contrast to Lee (2006), whose video elicitation relied on two pedagogic extremes, namely child-centred and teacher-directed clips to gauge teacher beliefs, my study uses a visual elicitation of a broad range of children' actual educational experiences that might locate the teachers' emerging beliefs in their actual practices along a continuum.

Winsler and Carlton (2003) found that staff beliefs and desires of a child-centred approach to learning could actually be different in practice. To explore the centres' interpretation of child-centred instruction in relation to children's daily activities, social affiliation and classroom practice, staff interviews and classroom observations indicated that their beliefs were not congruent with practice. Winsler and Carlton (2003) observed that children spent less time engaging in focused learning activities and only limited time

in focused activity, and that there was less positive affect expression by children and limited one-on-one teacher-child interaction, in contrast to teachers' beliefs. Consequently, in my study, I probe further any emerging contradictions through unstructured interviews with the teachers.

McMullen (1999) concluded that teachers who held high beliefs about DAP were likely to embrace DAP practices. Her conclusion that teachers who have a qualification in early childhood are likely to embrace DAP, was later corroborated by McMullen and Alat (2002) and Yoo (2005). McMullen (1999) reports findings of 20 early childhood professionals teaching children in the age range of between three and eight years, all qualified with a Bachelor's or Masters degrees in ECE, early childhood special education, child development or elementary education. The findings of this study revealed a difference in DAP beliefs among preschool and elementary teachers' beliefs, as preschool teachers scored highly on DAP measures. McMullen (1999) concludes from this study, that some factors, such as the educational level of the teacher, their internal locus of control, and their self-efficacy beliefs, positively influenced teachers' DAP beliefs and practices. The more internally controlled, high in self-efficacy, and qualified with an early childhood qualifications a teacher was, the more DAP they embraced, both in their beliefs and practices.

To be gleaned from McMullen's (1999) study is that some personality-related factors are likely to influence whether a teacher embraces DAP, in addition to the difference that teacher qualifications make in their predisposition to use DAP. However, this study compared preschool and elementary school teachers on aspects of their practices in relation to DAP, using a quantitative approach, among teachers qualified with either a Bachelor's or a Masters degree in an area of child development, unlike the current study which focuses on teachers' beliefs and practices in a continuum of DAP-related constructs, using a qualitative approach.

Parker and Neuharth-Pritchett (2006) confirm the probable sources of pressure documented by McMullen (1999), because they found that teachers were increasingly under pressure to devote more time to academic skills development, which seemed to contrast their knowledge of using DAP, in preparation for first grade (Parker & Neuharth-Pritchett, 2006:71). Their study, which explored 34 kindergarten teachers' beliefs about their instructional practices and the forces that shape education, concluded

that kindergarten had become increasingly academic. Conducted in a school in the south-eastern USA, using a mixed method approach, it found that while some teachers remained child-centred, others used teacher-directed approaches, and the rest blended both approaches. Parker and Neuharth-Pritchett (2006:71) concluded that there seemed to be two types of pressure experienced by the teachers, i.e. overt and self-imposed sources of pressure. The former originate from external forces, such as next grade preparation, while the latter related to teachers' own initiative to use teacher-directed approaches, because of perceived benefits, such as teacher control. This study informs my study about the possible sources of pressure that might inhibit teachers from using the DAP. However, it also differs from my study because it focused on the teachers' beliefs and practices among 34 teachers using a mixed-method approach, whereas I used a qualitative approach. In addition, the teachers researched by Parker and Neuharth-Pritchett (2006) were in a kindergarten, whereas those in my study taught four- and five-year-olds.

The pressure for academic skills might sometimes be a response to parents' demands, as Stipek and Byler (1997:317) observed. In their study, teachers responded to pressure from parents by increasing children's homework, giving more academic-oriented work, tutoring, and giving weekly spelling tests, even though they disapproved of such measures. Kwon (2004) corroborates the contrast between teacher practices and their beliefs in a Korean study.

Preschool teachers in Korea did not embrace the national policy guidelines for preschool education, which, according to Kwon (2004) supports a child-centred curriculum. Using a Likert scale, unstructured interviews of teachers and observations of specific children, Kwon (2004) established that despite explicit guidelines emphasising child-centred practices to foster creativity and individuality, teachers used direct approaches, including extrinsic motivation, worksheets and separation of playtime from work time - processes considered inappropriate in Western culture. The researcher's suggestion, though not derived from the study, was that such a discrepancy could be due to several factors, such as the reflection of Korean traditional education values, the low adult-to-child ratio, and parental pressure. This study confirms the existence of teachers' dichotomous view of children's work and play, a view that may hinder teachers' use of play in learning activities.

This study also indicates a possible reason for teachers not implementing policy guidelines as residing elsewhere, apart from concerns for remuneration, since the provision of preschool education in Korea was mainly state-provided. In Kwon's study, teachers were selective of the materials that they used. Therefore, the contrast between national guidelines and the actual practices reported by Kwon might suggest a possibility that Montessori philosophy and its guiding principles that emphasize use of materials, and that actual practice could be at variance. The present study seeks to explore preschool teachers' beliefs of developmentally appropriate practices, as played out in their classrooms, and the factors influencing them.

Cassidy and Lawrence (2000) have explored the rationale given by a mixed ethnic group of preschool teachers for their activities and behaviours. The sample included 12 female preschool teachers selected from three varied childcare centres in the USA, with qualifications that ranged from graduate studies in Psychology, Bachelor's' degree in ECE, Associate Degrees in ECE and College Education. One teacher had no formal education. Their experience level ranged from three to 20 years, with a mean of seven-and-a-half years of early childhood experience. Their ages ranged from 26 to 52 with a mean of 34 years. Three of these teachers taught in preschool classrooms, two taught two-year-olds, four taught in one-year-old classrooms, while three teachers handle infant rooms. Through one-hour videotaped observations of each teacher's classroom, the researchers collected data in blocks of 20 minutes in each of the following activities: free play of small group activity time, large-group time, and mealtime. The amount of observed actual time spent in each of these activities varied according to the age group with which each teacher was working. Overall, teachers displayed concern with children's socio-emotional development and with managing their behaviour. For these teachers, areas such as language and physical and cognitive dimensions took a peripheral emphasis.

Cassidy and Lawrence show that teachers might be selective in their emphasis on some areas of child development areas, such as emotional development, relegating domains such as language, physical and cognitive dimensions (Cassidy & Lawrence 2000). Teachers attributed their classroom practices to their experience and education, therefore informing the current study about some of the factors that might influence teachers' beliefs. In addition, Cassidy and Lawrence (2000) provide a significant rationale for the

present study because they identified a very important gap, i.e. the relationship between age group, beliefs and practice. Further, in this study, teachers attributed practice to experience rather than to education, contrasting the findings from other studies that found teachers' education influenced their beliefs and practices (McMullen & Alat, 2002; McMullen, 1999; Wang *et al.*, 2008:245).

The children in this study were younger (infancy to two-year-olds), and in an environment that might be expected to provide childcare more than school transition-academic skills-related activities. In contrast, preschools in Kenya are largely centre-based, often serving the role of school transition for children aged between three and five years (Prochner & Kabiru, 2008:128). Therefore, since the experiences of teachers might vary, depending on social expectations, it is reasonable to assume that results from a different study could also vary. Setting contexts could vary the expectations in children's experiences and priority areas in their development, as observed by Pang and Richey (2007:8).

Pang and Richey (2007:8) conclude from their anecdotal observations that preschool experience for children and parents in China is different from that in the USA. Whereas the preschool experience in China is likely to be highly structured, focusing on order, academic skills-oriented teacher directed approaches, in the USA it is likely to emphasize hands-one experiences (Hall & Robinson, in Pang & Richey, 2007:7), encouraging open interactions, creativity, sociability, and self-confidence in children. Moreover, educators in the USA might view parents as partners in their children's learning, unlike in China where parents are likely to feel afraid to raise issues on their children's education (Xu, in Pang & Richey, 2007:4).

Meanwhile, in Hong Kong, Pui-Wah and Stimpson (2004) sought to explore kindergarten teachers' understanding of play, approaches used, difficulties faced, and their power in finding solutions. Six kindergarten teachers were involved in an in-depth qualitative study, exploring their covert sense-making processes in implementing play. The researchers found that teachers' own rigid and mechanical thinking prevented them from including play in learning, even when they desired to. The study established that teachers' use one of three teaching and learning orientations, these being the technical, the fluctuating and the inquiry which reveals how thinking is involved in pedagogical shifts towards play-based learning. The findings of Pui-Wah and Stimpson, (2004)

provide insight into the role that teachers' beliefs have in their classroom decisions to use play or otherwise. Despite a desire to use play in their teaching, teachers failed to do so, perhaps out of certain undesirable consequences from their circumstances. Besides external pressure, Pui-Wah and Stimpson, (2004) demonstrate that there might be preconceived notions about child-centred activities that hinder teachers from embracing these. However, the experiential circumstances of the Hong Kong teachers are likely to be significantly different from those in Kenya, hence the results cannot be generalised to this setting.

In another Hong Kong study, Wong (2003) explored how the ways early childhood teachers' and their principles' attitudes to the implementation of a top-down curriculum reflected on their job satisfaction. Using an in-depth qualitative interview and group interviews, the researcher explored teachers and principles' reflections on their contrasting role perceptions as principle and as teachers respectively. Accordingly, one teacher-turned-principle confirmed that the two roles were different, and that each required different knowledge and skill levels. The teachers who previously used direct teaching resigned midway, when they were required to use a child-centred approach, citing lack of knowledge and skills, and more work involved in the new approach (Wong, 2003:46). However, when these teachers were equipped with the requisite knowledge and skills for implementing the project art, they reported a higher level of satisfaction attributable to the newly acquired knowledge (Wong, 2003:50). In spite of their reported higher levels of satisfaction, the need to respond to an external schedule to keep pace with the school administration introduced coercion to their schedules, which led to dissatisfaction (Wong, 2003:50). In this study, when the principals were not supportive, the student teachers found it difficult to nurture the children (Wong, 2003:51).

This study is important because it highlights some of the dynamics of curriculum implementation, such as perception of individual competencies, adequacy of skill, and support from the school administration (Wong, 2003). It also highlights some factors that negatively influence the implementation of the curriculum, such as pressure to adhere to school routines and programmes. However, Wong's study focused on teacher trainees and experienced preschool teachers who felt that the new ways of teaching were stressful for them. This implies that their experience had stabilised their beliefs about teaching,

and made it difficult for them to change, unlike the in-service teachers who were still undergoing training. Moreover, Wong's study was a comparative analysis of beliefs among early childhood teachers and principals, unlike the present study which seeks to explore preschool teachers' beliefs of developmentally appropriate educational practices.

2.7.4   BELIEFS ABOUT CHILDREN'S LITERACY EXPERIENCES

This section reviews empirical studies related to children's literacy activities. Early literacy development has been defined as "the ways in which young children acquire understanding, skills and knowledge related to aspects of early literacy such as; using books, early writing, using environmental print and aspects of oral language" (Nutbrown, 2007:32). My research was not solely about literacy development, but educational experiences that I conceptualize to include literacy development (process). It also examines the content of such experiences and related activities, such as the use of materials and the interpersonal relations, e.g. attention to children's learning differences.

The literature on early teachers' beliefs is voluminous, however I review only a few studies to provide insight into aspects of literacy that might be useful when interpreting my data. Therefore, the review will focus on teachers' beliefs of children's literacy experiences. Practitioners' beliefs about literacy and interpretation of the curriculum affect their provision of children's literacy (Miller & Smith, 2004). In addition, training and experience, perceived external pressure from the demands of primary school curriculum, and parental pressure, all add to the different interpretations of the same curriculum (Miller & Smith, 2004). The researchers examined the relationship between curricula as a basis for guided teaching at the foundation stage in literacy teaching, and the way these influenced children's experiences of literacy. In four diverse settings in London, the researchers spent five days in each setting. Using interviews, they captured data from playgroup leaders, nursery class teacher, two reception class teachers and the group leader in the day nursery. Each interview was audio-taped and analysed according to grounded theory. Three themes related to literacy that might be relevant to my study emerged, namely parental involvement, the curriculum and the children's experiences. Miller and Smith (2004) noted differences in literacy provision, and the delivery of the literacy curriculum between each setting, concluding that children had limited free

choice activities in the multilingual reception class, and that the National Curriculum that emphasized testing seemed to be influencing children's experiences of literacy.

Miller and Smith's study (2004) provides insight into the current study, by showing a relationship between beliefs and practices, besides the possibility that practitioners might interpret and implement the same curriculum differently. The study also suggests a conflict between early learning curriculum and national examination demands, which led to fewer free choice activities. It also emphasizes that children's experiences vary, depending on teachers' choices in their actual practices. However, Miller and Smith (2004) focused on literacy activities, which might reflect the concept of literacy acquisition in a much-enriched preschool environment, as the literacy checklist of forms of literacy materials reflected. Additionally, the study followed a mixed-method approach, one that could have privileged the findings. In contrast, a qualitative approach in the current study explores all the children's educational experiences in connection with teachers' beliefs.

Foot *et al.* (2004) explored eight early childhood teachers' beliefs and practices, working in periodic and full-day kindergartens, with a ratio of three teachers for every 45 children. The results of the study indicate that all teachers perceived books and stories, print-rich environments, and children's own initiated activities, as part of DAP literacy experiences. They were embracing integrated play-based activities, with adults interacting in many processes such as talking, reading, story-telling, listening, conversing, answering questions as well as retelling their stories. In addition, teachers valued opportunities for children that encouraged recognition of letters, sounds, writing their own names and frontal talking, as additional processes of encouraging literacy (Foot *et al.*, 2004:139). This study might suggest that the teacher-child ratio determines the direction of literacy interactions. The higher the ratio, the more sustained the conversations observed (Foote *et al.*, 2004). In addition, the more time children had at school, the more interactive opportunities they had to engage in literacy, as observed in full-day kindergarten. Foot *et al.* (2004:142) concluded that teachers' pedagogical practices have the potential to limit or expand children's literacy experiences.

Foote *et al.* (2004) highlight the importance of a high teacher-child ratio in enhancing literacy-related interactions. Apart from the role played by a high teacher-child ratio in facilitating engagement with literacy environment, this study also allude that the children

who attended full day Kindergartens had more time to engage with their own activities (Foot *et al.*, 2004). Ironically, though, this study advocates full-day kindergarten, and yet research links a long duration in kindergarten to a high level of stress in children (Vermeer & van IJzendoorn, 2006:39). Overall, Foote *et al.* (2004) imply that appropriate beliefs do not always translate in to practice, perhaps due to dynamic factors extraneous to the classroom, and that could still require further investigation, such as education and experience (Yoo, 2005).

The highest level of education and experiences were two factors that appeared to influence beliefs and literacy according to a study in South Korea by Yoo (2005). The mixed methods results indicated that there was a significant difference among teachers with different academic qualifications, in their beliefs about children's literacy. Incidentally, the number of years did not seem to influence teachers' beliefs about literacy because the quantitative analysis indicated that there were no significant differences among teachers with varying levels of teaching experience (Yoo, 2005:139). However, the teachers ages, ages of children and years of teaching experience did not seem to affect teacher's beliefs (Yoo, 2005:142). This study indicates that the teachers' training in certain methodologies seemed to affect their beliefs more than other variables.

The teachers supported a print-rich environment for the development of literacy, emphasizing listening, writing and reading as requisite components in language acquisition. Specifically, teachers preferred whole sentences to individual letters approach in teaching language (Yoo, 2005:143). They stressed the role of their own early exposure to books as a contributory factor influencing their choice of language teaching strategy. However, teachers who scored low on literacy beliefs emphasized the role of children's memorization of the alphabet through letter recognition, as a strategy of learning to read and write. Included in their emphasized strategies was learning to read from single letters to whole sentences through repetition, tracing and copying letters.

Yoo (2005) provides insight into the current study in that it gives perspectives on teachers' literacy beliefs, which may predispose them to teach children language in certain ways congruent with their beliefs and a possible reason for the choice of such beliefs. However, the study focused on self-reported methods used by the teachers in language development, a method prone to bias, as cited above as a shortcoming in quantitative studies using self-reports.

2.7.5   A SUMMARY OF RESEARCH ON TEACHER BELIEFS

Internationally, studies of preschool teachers' beliefs and practices are divergent in scope, with many and mixed findings on teachers' beliefs (Goldstein, 2007 a & b; Kim *et al.*, 2005:443; Maxwell *et al.*, 2001:443; McMullen *et al.*, 2005:461; McMullen, 1999; Stipek & Byler, 1997:318; Parker & Neuharth-Pritchett, 2006; Wang *et al.*, 2008:243; Yoo, 2005).

Some of the studies report concordance between beliefs and practice (Kim *et al*, 2005:443; Maxwell *et al.*, 2001:443; McMullen *et al.*, 2005:461; Phillips, 2004; Stipek & Byler, 1997:318; Vartuli, 1999:507; Wang *et al.*, 2008:243). Incongruous findings are documented by Cassidy and Lawrence, (2000:204), Foote *et al.* (2004:145), Fung and Chow, (2004:318), Jambunathan and Caulfield (2006:255), Wilcox-Herzog (2002), and Zeng and Zeng (2005:711). While some of these studies specifically focused on some aspects of developmentally-appropriate practices (Kim *et al.*, 2005:52; Jambunathan & Caulfield, 2006:252; Maxwell *et al.*, 2001:439; McMullen *et al.*, 2005:461; McMullen, Elicker, Goetze, Huang, Lee, Mathers, Wen & Yang, 2006:81; Zeng & Zeng, 2005:710), most of them are divergent in scope.

Factors cited that influence teachers' beliefs include pressure from parents (Kim, Lee, Suen, & Lee, 2003:347; Li, 2003:19; Phillips, 2004; Stipek & Byler, 1997:317; Winsler & Carlton, 2003:155), differences in grade level (Kim *et al.*, 2005:54; Vartuli, 1999:499), and teacher education level and experience (Cassidy & Lawrence, 2000:201; Maxwell *et al.*, 2001:435; McMullen & Alat, 2002; McMullen, 1999; Yoo, 2005). Additionally, variations in interactions could result from different perceptions pertaining to school readiness (Cuskelly & Detering, 2003:45; Lin, Lawrence & Gorrell, 2003:234; Parker & Neuharth-Pritchett, 2006).

Evidently, there are few studies that investigate teachers' beliefs in contexts other than that of the USA (Wang *et al.*, 2008:230), or the application of DAP in developing countries (Jambunathan & Caulfield, 2006). In addition, findings from these predominantly Western studies are incongruent, suggesting that the topic of teacher beliefs could be far more complex than theorized (Wilcox-Herzog, 2002:83; Goldstein,

2007b; Parker & Neuharth-Pritchett, 2006), or that even the concept of child-centred teaching might not easily translate to practice (Sugrue, 1997).

Therefore, such contradictions suggest the intricate nature of teachers' beliefs as a product of teachers' interactions in a social system as dynamic as the school (McMullen, in McMullen & Alat, 2002), or teacher's level of education (McMullen & Alat, 2002:83-84; McMullen, 1999; Wilcox-Herzog, 2002; Yoo, 2005). Other factors include experience (Cassidy & Lawrence, 2000), measurement specificity, and autonomy to practice beliefs (Wong, 2003), perhaps contributing to the emerging disparities between teachers' beliefs and their practices. From this previous empirical groundwork, I synthesize the justification for my study in the following section.

2.8   FINDING MY WAY FROM PREVIOUS STUDIES

As we come to the end of the literature review, the following have emerged as points related to my findings:

- Incongruous findings between beliefs and practices as cited in this chapter might mean that the beliefs and practices discourse might be far more complex, requiring further scrutiny.
- Methodological limitations: self-reports of teachers beliefs might not capture or access the intricate nature of beliefs through further questioning (Pretti-Frontczak & Johnson, 2001; McMullen & Alat, 2002; McMullen *et al.*, 2005; 2006). I used visual elicitation to explore and access beliefs.
- There is a need for studies that map teachers' beliefs in their work realities and their social contexts, to reflect how teachers in other contexts other than the USA have adopted the DAP framework (Jambunathan & Caulfield, 2006; Wang *et al.*, 2008:230). In this study I embrace the bioecological theory to provide a context-specific paradigm to interpret preschool teachers' beliefs and children's educational experiences.
- There seems to be no study that has focused on all the five constructs, namely teaching strategy, use of materials, scheduling, assessment and consideration of individual differences, so as to explore how they might relate to each other, in a continuum level of DAP from high DAP to low DAP.

- Beliefs and practices of teachers with certificate qualifications in areas of child development seem limited. Most studies have focused on teachers with Bachelor's degrees and even Masters qualifications.

2.9   A SUMMARY OF THE LITERATURE FOCUS

The literature review has focused on various facets of early childhood education that will illuminate the study findings and my interpretation of data. Some of the areas covered in this section include the origins and development of early childhood education and the Kenyan context of preschool education. In addition, empirical studies that include various facets of teachers' beliefs, DAP-related studies, classroom interactions and beliefs about literacy, have been presented. From the empirical studies as juxtaposed with the dynamics of preschool education in Kenya, I have also synthesized how my approach might be different from that taken in previous studies, hence the possible contributions of the current study.

A brief sojourn after voyage number 2

R: Hi,   we need to review what we have 'seen' and 'heard' in our journey so far…in summary, chapter two is about…

Those who watched and wrote the history of ECE

Travellers in the terrain of various facets of teacher's beliefs

The sojourners of preschool developmentally appropriate practice

The explorers of preschool interactions, the trekkers through the mountains of preschool teaching strategies

The landscape of Montessori learning, this was necessary so that we appreciate

The need to chain link, with other scholars gone before us,

Especially, so that we appreciate the uniqueness of this journey,

Never any like it before, only similar, so that later it should be clear, how the study fits into the past,

Especially, of the images we see, and the voices behind the actions in the next voyage,

But most importantly,
For now, we need a reason to go further along, on this different journey

Coming up next in voyage 3, a paradigm search and methodology

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Voyage 2: Linking with other voyagers in a similar direction