Investigating
Teaching and Learning
Within Three Eastern Cape Reception Year Classrooms

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of

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at

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by

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Field of study Early Childhood Development

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Abstract

Purpose and methodology

The purpose of this study is to explore the extent to which young children in three Grade R classes in the Eastern Cape Province were exposed to developmentally appropriate opportunities to achieve the Critical Outcomes as outlined in the South African National Curriculum Statement.

The research took the form of a case study. Semi-structured interviews and observations were used to collect data. Respondents included children, their parents, Grade R practitioners and the school leadership.

Findings

The findings tentatively showed that this set of parents perceived their role in providing for their children's developmental needs as separate to that of the GR practitioners. They seemed to see their roles as helping their children to develop social and emotional competence only, and that the GR practitioners provided, in addition to this, literacy and numeracy teaching to their children. In contrast, the three GR practitioners believed that parents were responsible also for promoting literacy, numeracy and life skills. There seemed therefore to be a lack of clarity of specific teacher and parent views of their roles.

The researcher found, however, that the children seemed to begiven few developmentally appropriate opportunities for planned and structured activities which enabled them to explore the Critical Outcomes, for example, working together, solving problems, using technology.

The teaching methodology used by the GR practitioners during the observation periods, seemed to a large extent, to be based in 'talk and chalk' in the plenary grouping. It did not seem to enable the implementation of the curriculum and especially of the Critical Outcomes in a developmentally appropriate way.

In addition, the environment in which children learned was not observedto be developmentally appropriate for relevant education to take place. Too many children were crowded into the available space, while learning equipment and materials were lacking.

Any competences that young children in these three GR programmes achieved were therefore possibly learned incidentally, rather than deliberately through planned activities. In addition, GR classes in this study were not observed to be supported within the schools to deliver competent curriculum activities to the children.

Recommendations

The study makes suggestions to meet some of these challenges. These include improving the understanding of curriculum guidelines of all role players in the three schools, enabling the management teams and especially parents to take a stronger support and monitoring role, and providing and using materials and equipment to promote the use of the Critical Out comes as methods for teaching and for learning.

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I would like to thank my supervisor, Margaret Irvine, for the consistent assistance that she gave throughout the process of writing this study in all these years. It is through her encouragement and advice that I managed to complete this study. Her critical but constructive comments throughout the study were meaningful to me. Her attitude, the conducive atmosphere she always created and maintained as well as her continuous guidance helped me a lot. Her support is overwhelming. I thank her very much.

Barbara Valentine

I would like to specifically thank Barbara Valentine for offering me an opportunity to explore and be exposed to ECD issues, as I am not teaching in the Foundation Phase. I thank her for her assistance in providing me with relevant information.

Nombuyiselo Mnene

I give special appreciation to my mother who has shown love and support for the whole of my life. During difficult times she has provided support by looking after my children so that I could focus on my study.

All participants

I would like to thank all who trusted me while I was visiting their classrooms. I thank all the practitioners who took part in the study for sharing with me their understanding of issues of interest in the study. To the principals I feel very blessed to be allowed to conduct the study in their schools. I am very grateful to have the support of parents who gave their time to share views about child development.

Declaration

I, Mthetheleli Mnene, declare that this thesis, 'Investigating Teaching and Learning within Three Eastern Cape Reception Year Classrooms' is my original work, and that all the sources that I have consulted, have been acknowledged.

East London ……
15 December 2011 M. Mnene

Acronyms

ANA	Annual National Assessment
AS	Assessment Standard
B.Ed	Bachelor of Education
CAPS	Curriculum Assessment Policy System
CO	Critical Outcome
CPM	Certificate in Project Management
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
DAP	Developmental Appropriate Practices
DoBE	Department of Basic Education
DoE	Department of Education
ECD	Early Childhood Development
EDO	Education Development Officer
FP	Foundation Phase
GR	Grade R or Reception Year
HOD	Head of Department
IP	Intermediate Phase
LO	Learning Outcome
LP	Learning Programmes
MLA	Monitoring and Learning Achievement
NCS	National Curriculum Statement (also called the RNCS in the documents)
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NPDE	National Professional Diploma in Education
NPDE	National Professional Diploma in Education
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
NSNP	National School Nutrition Programmer
OBE	Outcomes Based Education
PIRLS	Progress in International Reading Literacy Study
PTC	Primary Teacher's Certificate
REQV	Relative Education Qualification Values
RNCS	Revised National Curriculum Statement, also called the NCS
RSA	Republic of South Africa
SA	South Africa
SACE	South African Council of Educators
SACMEQ	Southern and Eastern African Consortium for Monitoring Education Quality
SAQA	South African Qualifications Authority
SASA	South African Schools Act
SGB	School Governing Body
SMT	School Management Team
SPTD	Senior Primary Practitioner's Diploma
TIMSS	Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study
UNESCO	United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation
USA	United States of America

Terminology used in this study

I give a brief overview here of two terms I use in this study, so that the reader knows from the outset what the terms mean.

Gender

I use the term ‘she’ when talking about a single child. In Chapter 4 all respondents are female.

Community and neighbourhood

I use these terms interchangeably as follows:

- community of interest (such as religious organisations, clubs, schools, clinics)
- community of location (a neighbourhood in which people live or work and which is in walking distance for them while they are in the area).

(Adapted from Irvine, 2010)

Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 Introduction

In this chapter I give the context and theoretical background of this study. I first set out the challenge I face in my own work as an Intermediate Phase (IP) teacher. Then I outline the research purpose, objectives and questions. Finally I give an overview of the whole study with a brief explanation of what each chapter contains.

1.2 Background: my reasons for undertaking this study

I am an Intermediate Phase teacher living and working in Mdantsane, a suburb of East London within the Buffalo City Municipality in the Eastern Cape Province. I have worked here for the past 10 years. I teach Grade 5 in all subjects. In my pre-service training at Dr W.B. Rubusana Teacher Education College I focused upon becoming a teacher in the Intermediate Phase. I followed this pre-service qualification with a Further Diploma in Education (Mathematics Education). In my studies for the B.Ed. Honours I specialised in Early Childhood Development (ECD) and its focus on Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP) from birth to the age of nine years. This brought my attention to the development and education of the child from birth and the impact of the child's development upon their later abilities and progress.

As an Intermediate Phase teacher, I receive children from different schools in the area. They have all been declared competent in Literacy, Numeracy and Life Skills in the local primary schools at the Foundation Phase level and at Grade 4 before they reach my class. But they seem to me to commonly show an inability to exercise basic skills for learning in the Intermediate Phase. That is, they seem to have low levels of literacy and numeracy skills.

This continually emerges in casual conversation as a common challenge with other Intermediate Phase teachers. Several teachers have noted this:

> *It is frustrating to see children at Grade 5 who cannot write clearly or express themselves properly. As much as you have content to cover you have to give that child an extra work which should have been mastered in lower grades as basis for learning.*
>
> *(Personal communication, 2008)*

> *According to NCS at Grade 5 teachers are expected to introduce children to two digit numbers in multiplication. You will be surprised to note that you take the first quarter of the year covering most of Grade 4 work in numeracy. It becomes worse when it comes to word problems.*
>
> *(Personal communication, 2008).*

My perceptions, and those of my colleagues, were confirmed by the Annual National Assessment (ANA), which measured the Literacy and Numeracy competence of all learners in South Africa in February 2011 (South Africa Department of Basic Education, 2011)[1]. The children at my school attained low scores, as the graph below shows[2]:

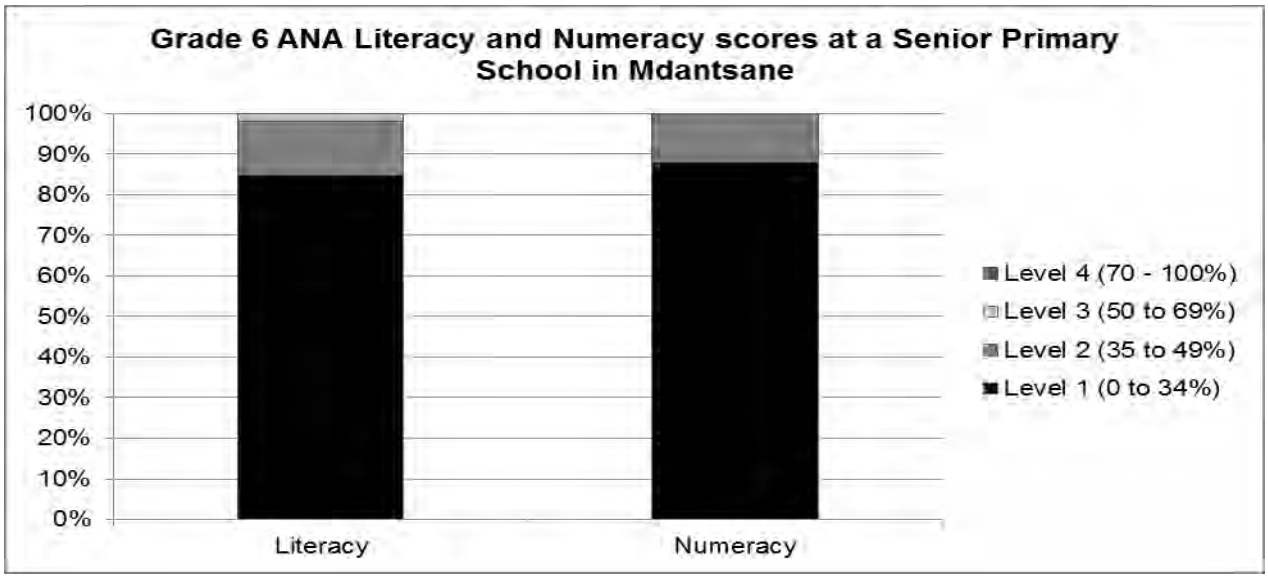

Figure 1 Annual National Assessments 2011: Grade 6 Literacy and Numeracy results at a Senior Primary School in Mdantsane

These results are very poor indeed. Only 2% of Grade 6 children achieved satisfactory results (50% and over) for Literacy, while no child achieved 50% or more for Numeracy.

In the three 'feeder' schools for my school, where the GR classes in this study are situated, the ANA scores in Grade 3 in 2010 (retrieved from the schools themselves) were as follows:

[1] The Annual National Assessment was conducted in February 2011, and measured the competence of children in the previous year.
[2] This data was obtained from the school itself.

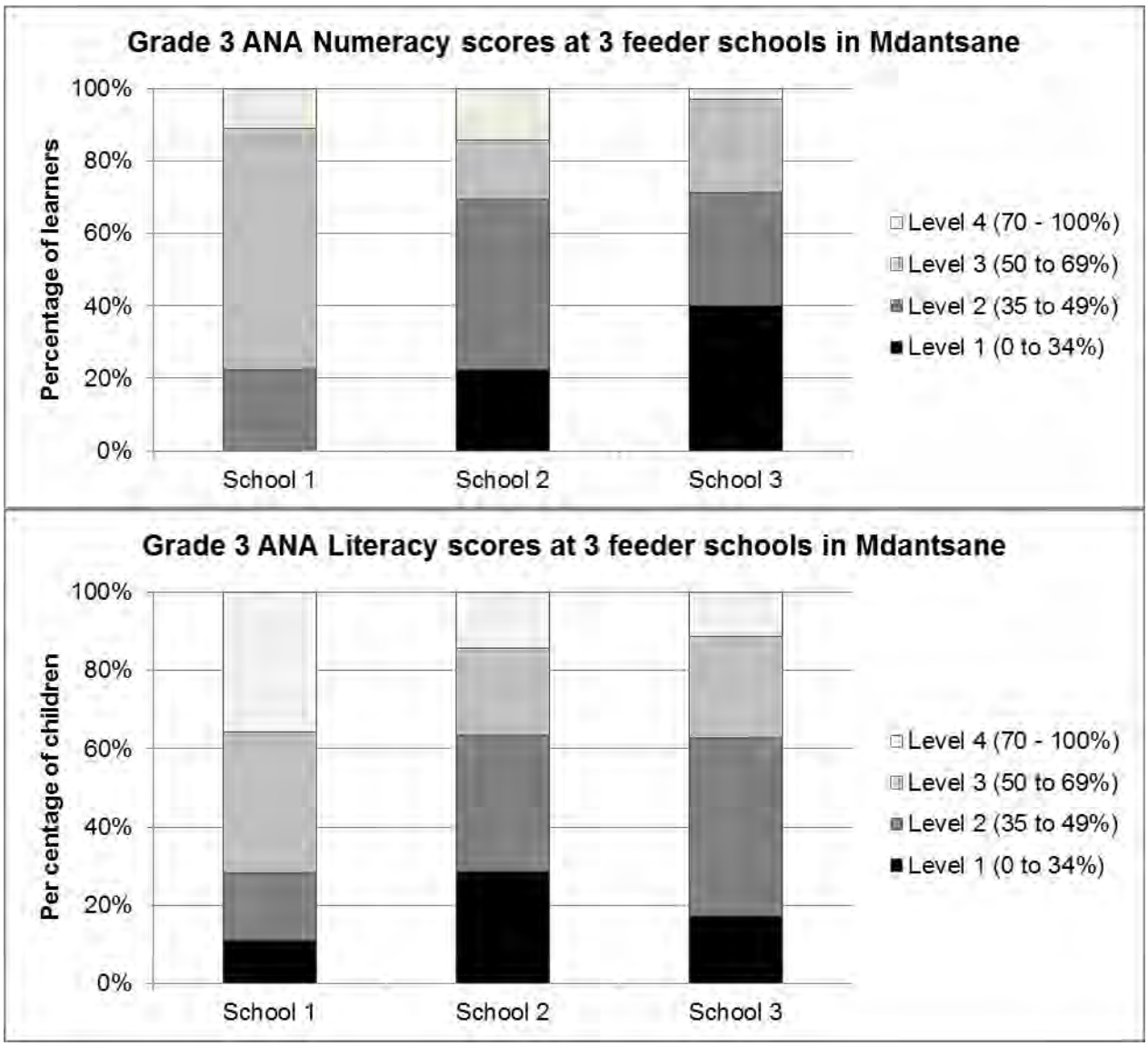

Figure 2 Annual National Assessments 2011: Grade 3 Literacy and Numeracy scores at 3 feeder schools, Mdantsane.

The levels of achievement are low, particularly in two of these feeder schools, although they are not as low as those achieved at the end of the Intermediate Phase at my school. This not only raises questions about levels of achievement in each of the Phases (including within the Intermediate Phase) but also raises questions about the preparedness of children to progress from the Foundation Phase to the Intermediate Phase. My observations of children entering the Intermediate Phase led me to question how teaching and learning in the lower grades contributes to achievement in the higher grades. The focus of my study is, therefore, how GR classes contribute to the levels of achievement at the end of the Foundation Phase in these schools.

In my reading of the literature I noted also that South African children do not perform well internationally. Van Staden (2010) stated

> *South Africa achieved the lowest score of all 45 education systems. It is evident that South African Grade 4 and Grade 5 learners achieved far below the fixed international average...*

Teachers also assumed that parents do not show responsibility for their children's education. One of the teachers at the school at which I teach said:

> *Opening for admission and closing for report card are the only days you see most parents. You invite them during the year to share experiences about their children but to no avail.*
>
> *(Personal Communication, May 2008)*

While this teacher may tend to put the blame for low levels of achievement on the parents of the children, it cannot be stated that this is the major reason for the low levels of achievement on average in the whole of the schooling system.

My own knowledge of and experiences in teacher education, and in this school, lead me to believe that the challenges that we face in the Intermediate Phase also relate to the earlier developmental and educational experiences of the children at school. This is related to the great concern over the poor performance, high dropout and high failure rate of South African children in schools, which led to a strong emphasis on the importance of pre-primary education in South Africa and to the launch of White Paper 5 on Early Childhood Development (Padayachie, Atmore, Biersteker, King, Matube, Muthayan, Naidoo, Plaatjies and Evans, 1994, p.9). This concern has continued to 2011 and is clearly set out as a major issue in the public schooling system (Jansen, 2011 cited in Mbeki, 2011).

Before I set out the problem statement and research purpose, I give an overview of the key concepts with which I deal in this study.

1.3 The context of this research

I used four key concepts in this study. I introduce them here and discuss each in more detail in 2.2.

1.3.1 Early Childhood Development

Education White Paper 5 in South Africa (2001) is founded upon the Bill of Human Rights in the Constitution. It defines ECD as *'an umbrella term that applies to the processes by which children from birth to at least 9 years grow and thrive, physically, mentally, emotionally, spiritually, morally and socially'* (South Africa Department of Education, 2001a).

The international body of knowledge about the benefits of early investment, the development of successful programs, the demands related to changing economic, social, demographic, political, and educational conditions, and new ways of thinking about children and society assisted in the development of the policy on ECD in South Africa (Evans and Murray, 2002).

White Paper 5 on ECD policy also notes the importance of early education in promoting children's later success in schooling:

> *1.2.2….With quality ECD provision in South Africa, educational efficiency would improve, as children would acquire the basic concepts, skills and attitudes required for successful learning and development prior to or shortly after entering the system, thus reducing their chances of failure.*
>
> *(South Africa DoE, 2001a).*

This is an important statement for this study. It not only links with my own perception that we teachers in the Senior Primary School need to understand and support ECD policy and practice, but also leads to the research purpose and objectives of the study, see 1.3 to 1.6 below).

In addition, the ECD policy promotes developmentally appropriate practice, the second major concept for this study.

> *5.3.3 Particular care will be taken to ensure that when addressing children's intellectual developmental needs, practitioners make use of developmentally appropriate practice. In other words, the kinds of opportunities that children are offered for language and literacy development, the development of numeracy and other mathematical concepts, and the development of critical thinking skills, for example, must meet children's needs at their particular stage of development.*
>
> *(South Africa DoE,2001a)*

1.3.2 Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP)

DAP is a framework of principles and guidelines for best practice in the care and education of young children. DAP is grounded both in the research on how young children develop and learn, and in research on education effectiveness, and therefore promotes young children's optimal learning and development (NAEYC, no date).

DAP is based upon three principles: that knowledge of child development, the individual child and the context in which the child lives and grows is important for working with each child; that the activities offered each child must be challenging and also achievable; and that teaching, to be effective, must be carefully planned. Effectiveness includes a focus upon creating a caring community of children, working closely with their families, teaching to promote development and learning, planning for teaching, and assessing children's development and learning.

DAP forms the basis of good practice within the South African context and in particular when it is related to the Critical Outcomes, as is made clear in White Paper 5 (see 5.3.3 in 1.3.1 above).

1.3.3 The Critical Outcomes (COs)

Both the National Curriculum Statement (NCS) for Grades R-9 (2002a) and the National Curriculum Statement Grades R-12: Curriculum and Assessment Policy (South Africa DBE 2011a, 2011b & 2011c) have as their basis the Critical Outcomes. They are derived from the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa and are contained in the South African Qualifications Act (South Africa DoE, 2002). They describe the kind of citizen the education and training system should aim to create. They aim to promote the following attitudes and behaviours so that people can:

1. *identify and solve problems and make decisions using critical and creative thinking*
2. *work effectively as individuals and with others as members of a team*
3. *organise and manage themselves and their activities responsibly and effectively*
4. *collect, analyse, organise and critically evaluate information*
5. *communicate effectively using visual, symbolic and/or language skills in various modes*
6. *use science and technology effectively and critically showing responsibility towards the environment and the health of others and*
7. *demonstrate an understanding of the world as a set of related systems by recognising that problem solving contexts do not exist in isolation.*

The COs seem to me to provide a methodology for teaching children the 'content' of the NCS/ CAPS from the Reception Year.

1.3.4 The Reception Year (GR)

The Reception Year is typically called Grade R (GR) and has been established as part of the Foundation Phase (FP) in line with the proposals in White Paper 5 (South Africa DoE, 2001a, 4:3).

The Reception Year in South Africa forms the first year of 'schooling' within the Early Childhood Development phase of life up to the end of the Foundation Phase. It is a continuation of the developmentally appropriate practice children should experience during the early years, from birth.

The Foundation Phase consists of a four year programme, of which three years are compulsory for all children (South Africa Department of Basic Education, 2011a, 1.4.1). The first year of this programme, GR, is at present implemented as a universal year with access for all. It is however, not yet compulsory for children to attend GR (South Africa, 2001a, 3.1.4.1).

The majority of children who enter Grade 5 in the school in which I teach have attended GR. In 2011, for example, 21 out of my own class of 35 Grade 5 children have attended GR. They therefore should have had some experience in working according to the COs and within the DAP approach.

In addition to the DAP approach, and to the use of the COs, one of the purposes of GR is to help children to prepare for the formal education programme which begins in the following year in Grade 1 (South Africa 2001a, 1.2.2).

GR practitioners play an important part, therefore, in providing young children with developmentally appropriate learning opportunities in order to achieve the COs as outlined in the NCS.

In focusing on the research problem below, I have adopted the two assumptions which underpin ECD and which are related specifically to GR practitioners:

- *A comprehensive program of child development is the one suitable for children from birth to nine years of age.*
- *For optimum development of children, GR practitioners should be well prepared for children's needs.*

(Padayachie et al., 1994, p.26)

To add on to these assumptions I have adopted others from DAP and from the COs (see above). I review these in terms of the curriculum for GR, the perceptions and values of the respondents, and the practices of the GR personnel within their own cultural contexts (see 2.8 and 3.9).

I acknowledge that the concept of culture is contested and problematic as a unit of analysis. In this study I will not attempt to define culture other than to state that many cultures co-exist in places and are influenced every day by the experiences of people.

Having set out the background and context of the study, I now describe the research problem, purpose, objectives and questions for this study.

1.4 Research problem

The quality of the learning opportunities offered in Grade R classes does not enable developmentally appropriate opportunities for developing the use of the Critical Outcomes, in the National Curriculum Statement.

1.5 Research purpose

The purpose of this study is to explore the extent to which young children are exposed to developmentally appropriate opportunities for learning in order to achieve the COs as outlined in the South African National Curriculum Statement.

1.6 Research objectives

The objectives of this research are to gain insight into

1. ways in which parents perceive their children's developmental needs and their own role in this, as well as the role of GR practitioner in providing developmentally appropriate activities
2. ways in which GR practitioners implement, through their teaching methodology (using the COs), the GR curriculum in a developmentally appropriate way
3. the competences that young children in the GR programmes achieve with regard to the National Curriculum Statement and the COs in particular
4. ways in which GR services are supported within the schools.

1.7 Research questions

The research questions follow on from the objectives and will assist me in meeting the purpose of this study. They are the following:

1. What do parents perceive to be
    a. their own children's developmental needs, their understanding of Developmentally Appropriate Practice and
    b. their and the GR practitioner' roles in supporting their children's development?
2. How do GR practitioners perceive children's developmental needs and their own roles in implementing DAP?
3. How do GR practitioners implement the GR curriculum within the context of DAP and the COs?
4. What do children do and learn while they attend GR classes?
5. What support do the GR classes receive within the school in implementing DAP and the COs?

1.8 Research approach

In order to answer these questions I have used the Interpretive paradigm in this study. This paradigm is characterized by a concern for the individual (Cohen, L., Manion, L. & Morrison, K., 2000, p.22). The Interpretive paradigm seeks to understand the subjective world of the human experience, including my own as the researcher. To maintain the integrity (the soundness and the meaning of the activities in their context) of the activities being investigated, we try to get inside the person and to understand from within (ibid). Interpretivist methodology attempts to understand the complexities of the social world (Burrell and Morgan, 1979). I discuss this in detail in Chapter 3.3.1.

Cohen *et al.* further stated that interpretive researchers begin with individuals and set out to understand their interpretations of the world around them. By interviewing GR practitioners, principals and heads of department as well as parents I will attempt to grasp their understanding of DAP and what methods of working with children (teaching, facilitating, supporting) they value most. I will triangulate (Cohen *et al.,* 2000 p.112) the information I gather from the respondents with observations of the practitioner and children during the school day. As a result, methods to be used in this research include observations and interviews.

I make meaning through my own interpretation of the data which I have collected. I reflect upon this issue in detail in Chapter 3.3.1.

1.9 Delimitation or scope of this study

This is a small scale study, working with three schools focusing on the Foundation Phase and three GR classes. All schools are feeder schools for the Senior Primary school (Intermediate and Senior Phases) in which I work.

This small sample means that the findings will not be generalised to a larger population, but will serve as a basis for suggestions to improve teaching and learning for practitioners and parents of the three schools, as well as for my own school. Findings and recommendations are relevant only to the three GR classes in the case study schools, and to the parents involved. The study may not be generalised to a larger population because the sample group is small and the respondents were not chosen randomly (Hancock, 2005, p.3).

Readers will be asked to make their own interpretations and meanings from what they read. People who do not easily read for academic purposes (the great majority of people concerned with this study) will make meaning through the follow-up meetings I hold with them to discuss the findings. For this purpose I will prepare an electronic presentation to deliver. Discussion will be held to a large extent in IsiXhosa, the home language of the participants.

1.10 Significance of this study

This research will

- give me a deeper insight into and understanding of ECD and the requirements of GR and the needs of and challenges to implementing excellent programmes at this level
- raise an awareness of DAP amongst my colleagues and assist my colleagues at school in the promotion of effective education for all children based on DAP and the COs
- assist me in my work as a promoter of the National Curriculum Statement (NCS) (including the 2011 edition: Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement - CAPS) in district workshops for practitioners in all phases

- encourage practitioners and parents participating in the study to be more informed about ECD and DAP, and to inform others on these issues (thought presentations of my research findings to them).

I, the researcher, intend to keep the schools informed of the progress of the study and its significance for the practitioners, parents, and children. In addition, Grade 1 teachers within the school setting may benefit in discussion of the research with their colleagues in the GR classes.

1.11 Structure of the study

I have structured the study as follows:

Chapter 1 Introduction to the study

Chapter 2 The review of the relevant literature on children's development, Developmentally Appropriate Practice and teaching methods that promote the Critical Outcomes as well as the context of education in Mdantsane.

Chapter 3 An outline of the research methodology which I use in gathering information on these issues

Chapter 4 Presentation of the Data

Chapter 5 Conclusions and Recommendations emerging from this study.

1.12 Conclusion

In this chapter I have explained the context of this study. I now continue with the investigation of the key terms and concepts related to the objectives.

Chapter 2 Review of the literature

2.1 Introduction

The purpose of this study is to explore the extent to which young children are exposed to developmentally appropriate opportunities for learning in order to achieve the COs as outlined in the NCS.

In this chapter, I discuss the concepts which relate to the purpose, the objectives and questions of the study.

First, I very briefly define some general terms which are used in this study. I then focus upon a discussion of GR, starting with an exploration of the policy context for GR, and a review of the concept of School Readiness.

Once this is established, I relate the notion of School Readiness to an overview of children's achievements in primary schooling, including in Mdantsane. I link this section to Bronfenbrenner's theory of the Ecology of Human Development (1979) and to the notion of DAP.

Having set out the context for this study, I set out the curriculum for GR in the context of the policy statements and in particular, the role of the Critical Outcomes. I do this in the context of Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP) and the Seven Critical Outcomes (COs) as a learning method.

2.2 Definition of terms

In this section I define the general terms or concepts used in this study with reference to South African contexts. These are: ECD; child; parent and GR practitioner.

A concept is an idea or a thought which we take into our mind (Oxford Dictionaries, no date). An example of a concept in this study is the idea of ECD, or of what a child is or what a GR practitioner is. A concept is our basic knowledge about an issue (see 3.3 for further discussion).

Our concepts, ideas, assumptions and beliefs are socially constructed through our own experiences from birth and within our own culture and belief systems and the environment in which we live. Kuhn (1962, cited in Mallon, 2008) suggested that, 'what a

man sees depends both upon what he looks at and also upon what his previous visual-conceptual experience has taught him to see, (1962/1970, p.113).

I have noted (see 3.9) that we may be dealing with both an African and a Western worldview. I therefore contrast these where I can. It is interesting to note that the two references cited in White Paper 5 are western in origin, that is, there seems to be no mention of African authors. The references WP 5 referred to are

- 1.3: A longitudinal study of children from low income families in the United States of America
- Preface and Section 5: Unicef's The State of the World's Children 2001.

In this study I choose the definitions of terms and later on the discussion of theory related to the study, according to the requirements of the purpose and objectives of the study.

2.2.1 The term 'ECD' (Early Childhood Development)

Internationally, ECD is defined as '*the period from birth to 8 years old. A time of remarkable brain development, these years lay the foundation for subsequent learning*' (UNESCO, no date). The World Bank (no date) defines ECD as *'young children's capacity to develop and learn'.*

Woodhead (2006) noted four ways of viewing early childhood development. They are

1. A developmental perspective which is based in children's physical and psychosocial growth during early childhood (also called the maturationist approach)
2. A political and economic perspective which is informed by developmental principles, translated into social and educational interventions, and underpinned by economic models of human capital
3. A social and cultural perspective which draws attention to ways in which ECD is constructed, understood and practiced, for, with and by young children. This approach is also sometimes called the constructivist approach (see 2.3.2)
4. A human rights perspective which is based on these three approaches but in ways that enable the child to respond within her own environment.

The South African approach to ECD is based upon the human rights perspective (South Africa 2001, 1.1.3).

According to the South African Children's Act of 2005 and 2007, ECD is defined, as it is in ECD policy (see 1.3.1), as the *'process of emotional, cognitive, sensory, spiritual, moral, physical, social and communication development of children from birth to school-going age'.*

The Department of Social Development is responsible for providing ECD services for children below school-going age (aged birth to four years of age) while the Department of Basic Education takes responsibility for children from GR onwards to the time when the child reaches the age of nine years, or the end of Grade 3 in the Foundation Phase (Berry, Jamieson and James, 2011).

The Department of Basic Education (DBE) deals with ECD from the age of five when children are admitted to Grade R (also called Reception Year). This year is the first of four years of the Foundation Phase of public schooling.

An ECD service is described as a service that intends to promote the development of children from birth to school-going age, which is provided regularly by a person who is not a child's parent or caregiver. This includes crèches for the very young, pre-primary schools and classes, and home-based services. On the other hand, an ECD programme within an ECD service provides learning and support suitable to a child's level of development. It is a planned schedule of activities designed to promote development. The child's age, stage of development and abilities must be considered when developing an ECD programme, and this is done within the bounds of the NCS (Berry, Jamieson and James, 2011).

ECD is seen as one of the developmental rights of young children, as defined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Achard (2004, p.54) defined a right as the protection of an important interest. Achard (2004, p.71) noted that the Convention of the Rights of Children (CRC) guarantees children minimum standards of health care, education and freedom from violence and cruelty.

In South Africa, not only are children's rights guaranteed in the Constitution (South Africa, 1996) but also in the Children's Act 38 of 2005 and the Children's Amendment Act 41 of 2007 (cited in Mahery, Proudlock and Jamieson, 2010), where the rights are set out for practice.

This study is therefore based in the children's rights approach, although I acknowledge that South Africans may have very different views in practice. Nsamenang (2006) noted

> *There are of course, universal and universalising 'standards', but they tend to be actualized differentially across cultures. In general, humanity's universal needs for survival, well-being and self-fulfilment are not satisfied in a universal manner….*

He continued

> *Thus, an essential but rarely examined feature of ECCE is how the world's diverse peoples parent, educate and guide children into mature and responsible competence….(but) In every culture there are practices that may be disrupt human thriving and well-being, such as female genital mutilation, cultural attitudes that deprive children from protein-rich food items, and the paternalism of Europe's civilizing contribution to backward cultures.*

I investigate this issue in Chapter 4 (see 4.5 and 4.6).

2.2.2 Children

The South African Constitution (1996) and the Children's Act 2005 define a 'child' as a person under the age of 18 years. This is in line with international definitions (United Nations, 1989).

For this study, I used the term 'child' to describe school children who are attending GR classes, as I have explained further on in 2.5. I use the term child rather than learner, but I retain the term 'learner' in direct quotations of government departments.

Children are eligible to register for the Reception Year at age four turning five by 30 June in the year of admission, and register for Grade 1 when turning six by the end of June (South Africa DoE, 1996). If there are a significant number of children in GR who are younger than this age, there will be an impact on the levels of learning and certainly in the teaching provided to them (South Africa DoE, 2008a, p.24).

There is a traditional view often encountered in South Africa that childhood is an extended period of dependence in which children are passive recipients of adult protection, training, wisdom and guidance, rather than contributors to their own development (Lansdown, 2005). In addition, traditionally children are to be 'seen and not heard'.

I do not share such a view as I believe, from my own experience, that children actively participate in their own development. By nature children are curious and active. Adults are often invited into, or need to intervene in, the child's world using their expertise as a form of guidance and protection. My belief is informed by the work of the Swiss theorist, Jean Piaget, who showed that children are not passive, but actively try to get meaning from all the experiences they encounter (cited in Smidt, 2002, p.3).

According to the NCS (South Africa DoE, 2002, p.8) the child, beginning in GR, is required to be

> *a lifelong learner who is confident and independent, literate, numerate and multi-skilled, compassionate, with a respect for the environment and the ability to participate in society as a critical and active citizen.*

In addition, the child is required to demonstrate the seven COs as part of her critical thinking and active citizenship skills (see 1.3.3 and 2.9 below).

2.2.3 Parents

'It takes a whole village to educate a child' says the African proverb. In the light of change in family structures due to various circumstances, this proverb remains true. The term parent is used to mean either the biological parent or the caregiver who has taken on the role of parent. A parent is the stable influence in the child's life. Many children have more than one 'parent' figure in their extended families, with several people taking on the roles of mother and father, especially where grandparents, older siblings, aunts, uncles and older cousins all live together (Adapted from Irvine, 2010).

The Children's Act of 2005 defines a parent or care-giver as any person or guardian who actually cares for a child. This includes adoptive parents, defined as a person who has adopted a child by any law (Mahery, Jamieson and Scott, 2011).

Many children have more than one 'parent' figure from their extended families, with several people taking on the roles of mother and father, especially where grandparents, older siblings, aunts, uncles and older cousins all live together. For the purpose of this study parent not only refer to biological parents but also to responsible adults within the family. The terms 'family' and 'parents', therefore, will be used interchangeably in this study.

The foundations of the child's knowledge of her personal, moral, social and religious life are laid at home (Gunter, 1990, p.200). These include values, attitudes, behaviour, language and a vast range of skills. Parents are and should, therefore, be fully involved in the child's development at school. Family life can be a source of inspiration and personal growth (Cosin and Hales, 1997, p.77). Poor parenting, on the other hand, is associated with low achievement and even criminality in later life (Utting, cited in Cosin and Hales, 1997, p.77).

2.2.4 Grade R practitioners

The word 'practitioner' is commonly used in ECD programmes as a term encompassing different roles and responsibilities, levels of expertise and qualifications, and including caregivers, teaching assistants and preschool teachers (South Africa DoE, 2001, p.18 and South Africa DSD 2006, p.8). A GR practitioner is equivalent to a Grade 1 teacher in that she is responsible for teaching a large group of children according to the guidelines laid down in the National Curriculum Statement (NCS). This issue is discussed in greater detail in 2.11.

For some time, the ECD sector has been dominated by women. That is evident as local preschools and crèches are almost all serviced by women only. Hence some literature makes use of the pronoun 'her' when referring to practitioners. Her responsibility according to Van Schalkwyk (1990, p.194) is to give assistance, render help, accompaniment and development of a child. Unlike teachers, GR practitioners are expected to work under supervision with programmes designed for them. According to the Norms and Standards for Educators of 2000, teachers are expected to interpret and design learning programmes, be scholars, researchers and lifelong children. GR practitioners, on the other hand, are not expected to carry out such roles unless they continue their education through level 5 and 6 (South Africa DoE 2008a, p.28). This means that, although they are responsible for all of the same work as a teacher in Grade 1, (that is, they are responsible alone for a large group of children), GR practitioners are not qualified at the same level, and do not carry the same level of professional responsibility. This no doubt impacts upon their ability to carry out their curriculum responsibilities (see 4.6 and 4.8).

According to White Paper 5 on ECD in order to improve the quality of Reception Year programmes, accredited Reception Year educators should register with the South

African Council of Educators (SACE). These are GR practitioners who are at least on Level 04 of the National Qualifications Framework.

In this section, the concepts of ECD, children, parents and GR practitioners have been defined as key to the whole study. The following section deals with the role of the Reception Year programmes. I use the term Grade R (GR) and Reception Year to mean the same thing.

2.3 The nature of the Reception Year (GR)

The Reception Year class, commonly known as GR or Grade 0, is offered in the year before formal schooling. Its importance was reflected in the South Africa's new educational dispensation when the National Department of Education of South Africa included the Reception Year as part of the Foundation Phase (FP).

This class is offered to four year olds who are turning five before the month of June in that year. According to the South African Schools Act (South Africa DoE,1996) Enrolment in GR is not compulsory for attendance but is recommended for all children.

2.3.1 The Role of GR in schooling

In this section I set out the major additional arguments for the establishment of GR in the country.

> *There are compelling economic arguments: increased productivity over a lifetime and a better standard of living when a child becomes an adult, later cost-savings in remedial education and health care and rehabilitation services, and higher earnings for parents, especially women, and caregivers who are freer to enter the labour market.*
>
> *(South Africa 2001, 1.2.3.3)*

This quotation links to Woodhead's (2006) analysis of ECD theory (2.2.1), and it defines the overall purpose of ECD policy in South Africa.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), stated that the purpose of education is to foster development of the child's personality, talent, and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential to prepare her for a responsible life in a free society, in the spirit of understanding, peace, tolerance, equality of the sexes, and friendship among all peoples (cited in South Africa DoE, 2008b).

This definition focuses upon the child as a human being first of all and does not only refer to Literacy and Mathematics outcomes for schooling.

According to the White Paper 5 (South Africa, 2001a), however, the purpose of GR is similar, with the addition of literacy and Mathematics outcomes:

- *To give….adequate opportunities (for children) to develop to their fullest potential.*
- *To ensure the co-ordinated and integrated development of young children from birth to age 9.*
- *To ensure that the educational component of ECD is planned in a continuous developmental sequence from birth to age 9 in collaboration with all our social partners.*
- *To ensure the optimal utilisation of available resources, and the strengthening and expanding of existing services.*
- *To promote early literacy and numeracy*

(South Africa, 2001a, 3.4.1 to 3.2.10)

GR, therefore, sets out to equip children with the basic skills and knowledge required for formal learning, enabling them to be school ready by the time they enter Grade 1.

According to Davin and van Staden (2005, p.1), GR can play an important role in the development of the young child only if the teacher knows exactly what the purpose of this year is. GR practitioners and parents, therefore, should know what is it that they want to achieve. The role of the Reception Year (GR) is to set the child on the lifelong path of learning (Davin and van Staden, 2005, p. 1). This means that the child should be developed in totality and be prepared for formal learning in the next grades (see 2.2.2).

This means that the GR practitioner must have a thorough understanding not only of how children develop and how to promote learning in each child within her own environment (DAP) but also of the curriculum for GR and for Grade 1, which is based on the methodology of the seven COs (see 2.2.3 and 2.9).

Aubrey, David, Godfrey and Thompson (2000, p.183) claimed that the provision of early childhood education was intended to ensure that preschool children work towards common learning outcomes, including language, literacy and mathematics at school entry. The goal is to prepare children thoroughly for the formal curriculum of Grade 1 (Aubrey *et al.,* 2000, p.190).

Several studies have found that when children had attended GR classes, they were more ready to learn than those who did not attend pre-primary (cited in South Africa DoE 2005, p.57). Research has also shown that intervention in the early years prevents later GR repetition and also school dropout. Maggi, Irwin, Siddiqi, Hertzman and Hertzman (2005, p.27) stated that there is now a body of evidence showing that ECD programmes are effective in improving children's developmental trajectories, and are therefore better seen as investments than as expenditures. Such investment is seen when there less remedial education, juvenile delinquency, incarceration and teen pregnancy (ibid).

But, although we have a low repetition rate in the GET Band in South Africa, this may be because of the progression policy for promoting children from one grade to another (South Africa Department of Education no date) and may therefore have little to do with academic competence.

Anderson, Shinn, Fullilove, Scrimshaw, Fielding, Normand and Carande-Kulis (2003, p.38) argued that a strong body of evidence shows that early childhood development programmes have a positive effect in preventing delay in cognitive development and in increasing readiness to learn. Studies show that good programmes also serve to narrow the school readiness gap between low-income children and their more economically advantaged peers (Ibid).

The role of GR is therefore to ensure the holistic development of children prior to their entry into Grade 1, and to ensure a good start in the formal schooling system (becoming ‘school ready'). In this study I investigate this in terms of DAP and the seven COs.

In Chapter 4, I set out the evidence I have collected regarding not only the use of DAP and the COs but the Literacy and Mathematics outcomes which arise from the use (or lack of use) of these two methodologies (theories).

In the next section, I discuss the issue of school-readiness of children and of child-readiness of schools. Both of these concepts relate to DAP and to the use of the COs as methodology.

2.3.2 The idea of School Readiness (and of Child Readiness)

The World Bank (no date) notes that ECD has as its goal, school readiness.

> *A child who is ready for school has a combination of positive characteristics: he or she is socially and emotionally healthy, confident, and friendly; has good peer relationships; tackles challenging tasks and persists with them; has good language skills and communicates well; and listens to instructions and is attentive. The positive effects that ECD programs have can change the development trajectory of children by the time they enter school. A child who is ready for school has less chances of repeating a grade, being placed in special education, or being a school drop-out.*

This statement links to Woodhead's analysis of types of ECD provision (see 2.2.1). There are different views about the concept of school readiness. Some authors take a maturationist perspective or a psychological view to define school readiness (see 2.2.1). To them readiness refers to the mainly biological development of psychomotor, cognitive, and emotional structures that are foundations of child behaviour (Graue, 1993, p.6). This means that the child needs to be physically and mentally ready for formal instruction.

Behaviours are classified by age resulting in developmental patterns and sequence. According to Graue (1993, p.261) this view ignores one aspect of development that says ages are only indicators of central tendency rather than rules for appropriate action. According to this view, the activities that teachers provide are driven by expectations of age-defined development. This idea is seen within the DAP theory in that for GR to be relevant, we do need to have a good understanding of child development theories, although this is but one of three principles (see 2.6).

Faber and van Staden (1997, p.176) claim that such a definition is not satisfactory as it emphasizes the demands of the school (school readiness) not the possibilities of the child (readiness to learn). Further they claim that in this context school readiness is ‘perceived as a fixed state’. Such definitions lead to questions of *'What do we do if they are not ready?'*

In contrast to the maturationist perspective, other authors view readiness according to a constructivist perspective (see 2.2.1). In this view, the interaction between individual and the environment is key. Readiness is viewed as a socially constructed set of ideas or meanings used to shape the first formal school (Graue, 1993, p.5). This is a key concern

of DAP (see 2.6). We cannot rely only upon a deep knowledge of child development without taking into account the context in which the individual child grows and learns.

In addition, Faber and Staden (1997, p.176) and Graue (1993, p.259), see r*eadiness to learn* as opposed to *school readiness*. According to this view, development is an on-going process where a child is always ready to learn a new skill, knowledge and behaviour while the role of the adult is to provide developmentally appropriate activities (Faber and van Staden 1997, p. 177). The focus is on possibilities rather than deficiencies (Graue, 1993, p.259). But this theory, although useful for developing an attitude of possibility, is not useful for defining learning readiness in the context of GR because all people, from birth to death, are in the on-going process of developing and learning.

GR is considered to be a preparatory class for formal schooling to commence in Grade 1. Its purpose is to prepare young children for formal schooling. It is important, therefore, that they are provided with experiences that will make them feel comfortable in the next grade. Curriculum should seek to address that by providing appropriate practices.

In the theory of child-readiness or child-friendly schools, contrasted with the idea of school-readiness, a brief definition of this concept is that a child-ready or friendly school (and GR class) will

- be rights-based and inclusive
- provide quality education.
- be safe, protective and supportive.
- be health-promoting and health-seeking
- be gender sensitive , promoting equity and equality.
- build and maintain linkages and partnerships with the community (South Africa, 2008d).

Child-ready GR classes will demonstrate all of these aspects and for the purposes of this study, I use those aspects which are particularly relevant to DAP (see 2.6).

2.4 Children's achievements in school: levels of 'school-readiness'

While South Africa has experienced one major change in curriculum followed by several adjustments since 1994, the goal of quality learning through quality teaching still remains

difficult to reach. This factor was one which led to the establishment of the GR year in the Foundation Phase (see 1.3.1).

The research completed prior to the publication of White Paper 5 in 2001 noted that the quality of learning and teaching in the early years was unsatisfactory:

> *The quality of the Grade R should be improved. While primary schools and community based sites are now offering a similar quality of education, this overall quality is still too low'. (South Africa DoE, 2001a, p.21)*

2.4.1 National studies

Various studies have been conducted at international, national and provincial levels about the achievements of South African children.

The Department of Education's Education for All Assessment (2000) based on data from the 1999 South African Monitoring Learning Achievement (MLA) in Literacy, Mathematics and Life Skills found that the average score of Grade 4 children was below 50% (Chisholm 2004b);

Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) results in 1995, with follow up studies in 1998, indicated that South African children perform more poorly than any participating country. In the TIMSS of 2003 SA was ranked lowest of all countries in primary school mathematics and in the bottom quintile for Literacy (South Africa DoE, 2008a, p.35).

The Southern and Eastern African Consortium for Monitoring Education Quality (SACMEQ) II and III studies focused on grade 6 in reading and mathematics. The report indicated that most South African children, in Eastern Cape in particular, fall between levels 2 (emergent skills) and 3 (basic skills) in both reading and mathematics (SACMEQ 2010). This is despite South Africa's much higher educational expenditure per child than in any other country in the region, with the exception of Botswana (Chisholm 2004b).

The Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) is an international comparative study that compared the performance of South African Grade 4 and 5 children in reading literacy to other countries participating in the project. The study revealed that in 2006, 78% of Grade 5 children in South Africa had not developed the

basic reading skills required for learning. The South African national average reading competence has been shown to be far lower than the international norm as PIRLS ranked the literacy levels of South African Grade 4 and 5 children the lowest of the 40 participating countries (Chisholm 2004b and PIRLS 2006).

In addition, the National Systemic Evaluation, conducted in Grade 3 in 2001 and again in 2009, as well as Grade 6 in 2005, revealed that the overall average performance in both Literacy and Mathematics was still low at 36% and 35%, respectively.

> Overall, the study indicates that the majority of Grade 6 learners have not achieved the expected assessment standards, a result that has serious implications for the ability of Grade 7 teachers to cope with a diverse learner population in *terms* of knowledge and skills' levels; this also has corresponding policy implications for teacher recruitment and teacher education and development (South Africa DoE, 2005, p.2).

The reports examined the influence of various factors, including socio-economic status, parental involvement, use of resources and so on. This focus on the context for teaching and learning is strong also in the DAP approach (see 2.6).

Mtshali, Smillie and SAPA (29 June 2011) confirmed the same results of earlier international surveys of Grades 3 and 6 saying "*Many of our kids can't read or write".*

In *Getting Schools Working*, Taylor, Muller and Vinjevold (2003, p. 41) argued that studies conducted in South Africa from 1998 to 2002 suggest that "children's scores are far below what is expected at all levels of the schooling system, both in relation to other countries (including other developing countries) and in relation to the expectations of the South African curriculum. Their research has revealed that at the end of the first three years of schooling, children have only a rudimentary grasp of the principles of reading and writing. When they are assessed, it is clear that they are unable to perform satisfactorily at either national or internationally accepted levels. When considered at the level expected by the National Curriculum Statement, they are performing 1 to 2 years below Grade 3 level and 3 years below Grade 6 (Ibid, p. 129 and Chisholm 2004b).

2.4.2 Provincial Studies

The performance of Eastern Cape grade 3 children in all three learning areas, Literacy, Mathematics and Life Skills, is generally low compared to the National Average (SA 6 June 2006 cited in DoE 2008a, p.34). The Grade 3 Teacher Assessment which was

conducted according to the guidelines and purposes of the Imbewu Evaluation Programme which became known as the Eastern Cape Comprehensive Evaluation Programme in 2004 stated that:

> *Children in all schools tended to be passive, asking very few questions other than in answer to their teachers' (mainly closed-ended) questions and instructions. Observation was that children engaged in mainly oral, plenary, transmission learning in all schools.*
>
> *South Africa, Imbewu II, 2004*

The Annual National Assessment (ANA) (South Africa DBE 2010) showed low achievements in Literacy and Mathematics. On average, out of 10 children, 8 are functioning at levels lower than 50% (level 1 and level 2) in these assessments. This is so in the three schools which took part in this study.

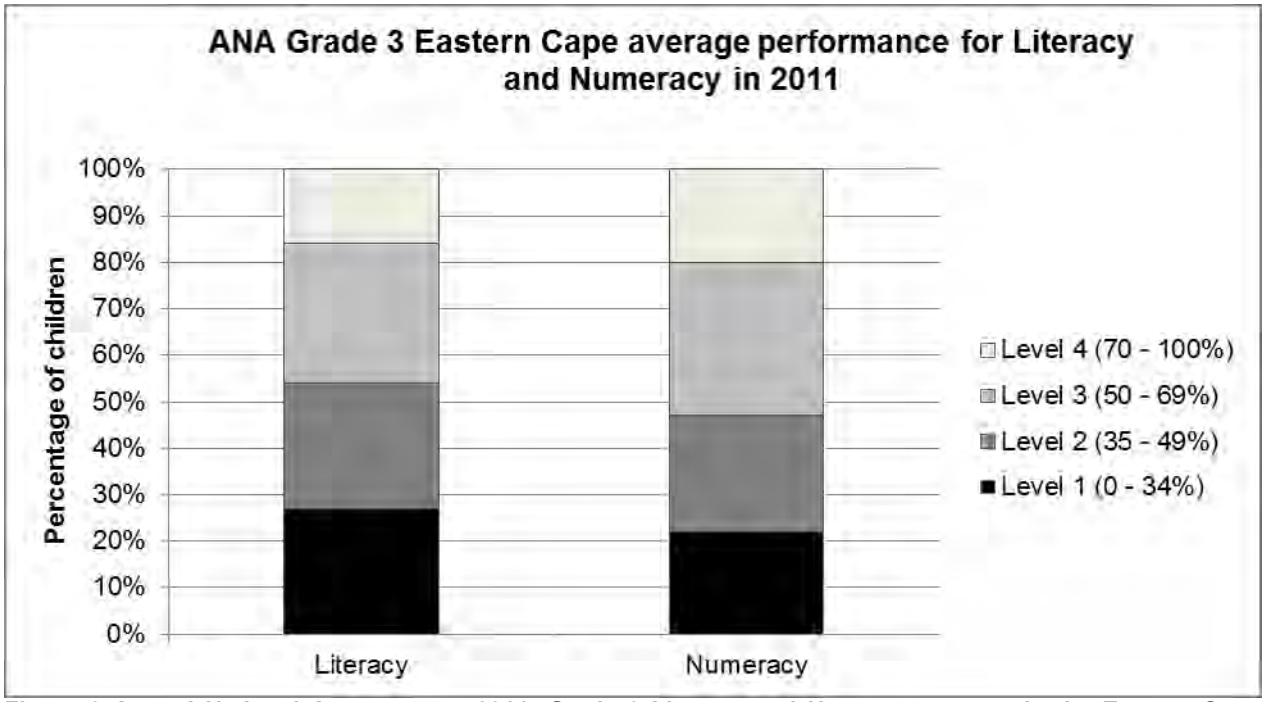

Figure 3 Annual National Assessments 2011: Grade 3 Literacy and Numeracy scores in the Eastern Cape province.

With ANA 2010, however, the results, showed that there is some improvement in Eastern Cape Grade 3 performance compared to earlier assessments (South Africa DoBE, 2011, p.19). Such improvement will need to be tested again as it has been noted on the ANA 2011 report that there has been similarity of response to the same question in the same school which suggests that test administration procedures may not have been properly carried out (South Africa DBE 2011, p.28). There is therefore no certainty that the introduction of the GR class has assisted in the improvement.

Overall, the achievement of children in the national systemic evaluations and in international assessment studies was very poor and a cause for great concern. (South Africa DoE 2008a, p.34)

My interest in the causes of the low levels of achievement at the end of the Foundation Phase and my interest in ECD, has led me to investigate the ways in which children are taught for leaning in GR. This may shed some light on the reasons why South African children are scoring low levels in Literacy and Mathematics.

In the preceding sections I set out the educational environment of GR that children encounter when they attend the schooling system. In the following section I explain a theory describing the impact of the environment upon the child before I establish the environment for children's development and growth in Mdantsane. This theory is the Ecology of Human Development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

The word 'environment' here refers both to the physical and the social environment. In other words children need to be exposed to real life experiences which enable them to interact with the world around them, including communication with other children and adults (National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC no date). When we talk about interaction with the physical environment we mean the way in which children explore and discover the world around them.

2.5 Bronfenbrenner's Theory: The Ecology of Human Development

In his theory of child ecology, Bronfenbrenner saw the child as being at the centre of concentric circles of influences (Penn, 2005, p.9). This means that child development cannot be explained outside the context of the child. This idea is a principle of DAP (2.6) and links strongly to the cultural considerations of child development theory (see 3.9) and to Woodhead's (2006) third, constructivist analysis of theory (2.2.1).

Bronfenbrenner's use of the term 'ecology' refers to the relationship of the person to the environment and how the environment or surroundings affect that person. Individual children's development and growth, although constrained by age and stage, is very much influenced by their surroundings. The environment - the family within the neighbourhood, and economic and political structures are seen as a full aspect of life (Lang, 2005).

The context refers to different levels of environment that influence children's development. They include the microsystem, the mesosystem, the exosystem, and the macrosystem (Penn, 2005).The chronosystem describes the times in which the child lives. I describe each of these systems below.

2.5.1 The microsystem

This is the immediate environment of the child and includes family, peers, school and neighbourhood. Each child's own development is affected by the relationships that the child forms. Children require healthy, positive relationships to develop optimally. Therefore the attitudes and behaviours of the parents and of the GR practitioners are most important for GR. The impact of the social and economic status of the child's family and neighbourhood is also very strong. This is reflected in DAP theory (see 2.6), and I deal with this aspect in some detail in 2.7 (the developmentally appropriate context of learning in GR). I focus upon this aspect in my research methods (3.7.1.to 3.7.3: interviews, observations and field notes) and in the report on findings in 4.7.

Bronfenbrenner saw the environment of an individual, also called the social context or milieu, as the culture that he or she is educated and/or lives in, and the people and institutions with whom the person interacts. In order to work within DAP and to achieve the COs, resulting in effective learning and teaching, the school environmental factors should favour children, that is, be child centred or child friendly.

2.5.2 The mesosystem

This is the second level of the child's environment. It includes relations between microsystems, for example, between home and the school. These relationships include interaction between parents and GR practitioners. I shall focus upon this in 2.8 and in the findings in chapter 4.

2.5.3 The exosystem

The third level of environment is the exosystem*.* This level refers to issues which affect children for example, school policies or the influence of a parent's employment on the life of the child.

2.5.4 The macrosystem

The fourth level is the macrosystem*,* the wide context. This level includes, for example, policies and the culture in which the child grows up. I have discussed these policies in 2.3.

Even a child in a loving, supportive family within a strong, healthy community at the level of the microsystem, mesosystem and the exosystem is affected by the biases of the larger society, such as racism or sexism, and may show some effects of its negative stereotyping and discrimination (NAEYC, 2009, p. 13).

2.5.5 The chronosystem

Over all of these levels is the chronosystem. This is about the times in which we live, and includes all the events that happen to us and in our family, neighbourhood, ECD programme and the country and world. Each will have an impact on the person, even when the person is very young. An example of this would be that a child who was born in 1976 or 1985 will have a different chronosystem impact from a child who was born in 1994.

The learning, therefore, of GR children depends not only on the expertise of the GR practitioner, but also on factors ranging from socio-economic home conditions to official policy provision. This is why the DAP theory is important in understanding the 'school-readiness' and the 'child-friendliness' of the GR class (see 2.4).

> *Child development takes place through processes of progressively more complex interaction between an active child and the persons, objects and symbols in its immediate environment. To be effective, the interaction must occur on a fairly regular basis over extended period of time.*
>
> *Bronfenbrenner cited in Delzer 2005)*

This supports Piaget's and Vygotsky's assertions that children explore the world individually as well as with interaction with their environment in and particularly with their social context (Sylva 1997).It also supports Nsamenang's (2006) views on the role of the child's culture in its learning.

Bronfenbrenner's theory emphasises the importance of human relationships. He stressed that positive youth development requires a caring parent, supportive teacher and positive peers (Brendtro 2006, p.163). 'Caring' means that children need someone to show them appropriate ways to behave, someone talking and reading with them and someone to create an environment that is conducive to play. Bronfenbrenner called these experiences ' primary engines for human development' (2005, p.6). This theory also endorses Vygotsky's view that learning is the result of social interaction (Learning-Theories.Com no date),

In the next section I briefly apply Bronfenbrenner's theory to Mdantsane, the suburb of East London where my study is situated.

2.5.6 The ecology of the child in Mdantsane

I discuss the microsystem and the mesosystem in the chapter on research findings (see 4.4 and 4.7). Here I apply the ecology theory to the macrosystem, the exosystem and to the chronosystem of the child living in NU8, Mdantsane.

2.5.6.1 The macrosystem

Janse van Rensburg-Bonthuyzen, Heunis, Engelbrecht, Meyer and Summerton noted in 2003 that Mdantsane was planned as a dormitory township to serve East London industries in 1957, and in 1958 land from the white-owned farm called Umdanzani was released for this purpose. The first residents moved in by the end of 1963 when East London was becoming a border industry area, located as it was in close proximity to the Transkei and Ciskei homelands.

Mdantsane was considered a dormitory township to serve East London as well as a homeland city to provide employment for the influx of population into Ciskei from as far away as the Western Cape (Dauda, 1996 cited in Janse van Rensburg-Bonthuyzen *et al.,* 2003).

2.5.6.2 The exosystem

Mdantsane is the second largest township in South Africa after Soweto with an estimated population of 250, 000 people (Nyatela, 2007). In 2007, there were about 45, 384 households of which a third earned less than R1000 per month. The majority (over 60%) of the population of Mdantsane are children and youth below the age of 35. (Nyatela, 2007).

Within Mdantsane is the Senior Primary school at which I teach. My school with the three feeder schools which are respondents in this study are situated in Unit 8 commonly known NU8.

There are 1,600 households in NU8 (according to the numbering of houses in the Unit) and a number of informal houses in this area. Three Junior Primary, two Senior Primary Schools and one Senior Secondary School serve the children of this area. Residents of NU8 are secured by a clinic.

Figure 4 Formal and informal housing in NU8, Mdantsane

When not at school, children play in the streets close to their homes. These streets are not well maintained and very few are tarred. They are not safe for children, but there are no play grounds in the area for them.

2.5.6.3 The chronosystem

The adults in the families living in Mdantsane had experienced Apartheid. Those who remember being moved to Mdantsane from other areas are now in their fifties and sixties, while all others will have experienced life under Apartheid. They will also have seen the slow improvements that are being made now to the suburb through the housing, electrification, water and roads projects. The children, however, in this study will have only lived experiences of the past five or six years when renovations have been made to the suburb, within the time of electronic communications (the cell phones and television). The respondents in this study will have this background (see 4.3).

Within this environment, households and schools in Mdantsane are educating their children. I now investigate the theory of Developmentally Appropriate Practice.

2.6 Developmentally Appropriate Practices (DAP)

In this section I define and discuss Developmental Appropriate Practices (DAP) with reference to children in GR.

The word ‘appropriate’ comes from the Latin word ‘appropie’ which means to make something one's own or to own an idea or an action (Oxford Dictionaries no date). When children are learning through DAP, I believe that it means that they construct their own understanding of the world based on their age, individual, cultural and social contexts.

The theory of DAP was first devised by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) in 1986. The updated statement on DAP (NAEYC, 2009) explained the reasons for this theory being adopted and strengthened in the United States of America. The reasons included:

- ECD was underfunded and there was a shortage of good care for children in this sector even though it is so important in human growth and development;
- low-income children lagged significantly behind their peers on standardized comparisons of academic achievement throughout the school years and experienced more difficulties at school

- many more children with special needs were being recognised in the education system, but there was insufficient funding for their needs
- the issues of home language and culture (for example, African American and Hispanic) in a dominant second language (English) environment so that often there is also a mismatch between the 'school' culture and children's cultural backgrounds (NAEYC, 2009, pp. 3-4).

In addition, the USA curriculum, which was based on many standards to be achieved by the children, was seen as overwhelming to teachers and children alike. It would possibly lead to teaching practices which favoured the curriculum rather than the children themselves: for example, very strict and detailed daily timetables (NAEYC, 2009, p. 5).

DAP is therefore a response, in the USA, to challenges to the education and care of young children.

These challenges and possible responses are reflected in our own context here in South Africa. GR is underfunded compared to Grade 1, (see 2.12.1), the majority of children in our country are living in income poverty (see 2.5.6.2), education policies include children with special needs in the mainstream but do not offer additional funding (White Paper 6). There is possibly a mismatch between home and school cultures (see 2.3.2 and 2.4 for discussions on this aspect).

As a result of this situation in the USA, there was concern that schools were not focusing on experiences such as problem solving, collaboration with peers, opportunities for emotional and social development, and opportunities to explore and to investigate and to gather information (NAEYC, 2009, p. 4).

This idea reflects the fourth objective of this study (the competences that young children in the GR programmes achieve with regard to the National Curriculum Statement and the COs in particular).

DAP sets out three principles for us to take note of. They are:

Principle 1: the importance of information about child development and learning and especially age-related characteristics which allow us to make general predictions about

what experiences are likely to best promote children's learning and development. This is reflected in the South African GR practitioner training where one of the core modules is entitled 'demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the development of babies, toddlers and young 'children'

Wien (1995) pointed out that developmental theorists such as Piaget, Vygotsky, and Bronfenbrenner have told us much about child development. Based on their theories, developmentally appropriate practices reflect an interactive, constructivist view of learning. DAP suggests that the focus of most activity for young children should be the child's interaction with materials and people. Each child should have her own materials and be able to offer her own talk, rather than having talk and actions constrained by group process or by teacher direction (Wien, 1995, p.100). This means that the GR practitioner should provide activities for the children to do themselves, rather than to do them herself. She will therefore ensure that each child focuses with interest on activities which the child can own as part of her important leaning for the moment.

Principle 2: Every GR practitioner (and parent) needs to know about each child as an individual because this enables the adults to be responsive to the individual needs and interests of each child. This means that the GR practitioner needs to carry out the principles of DAP stated by Morrison (2001, p.279 cited in Davin and van Staden, 2005, p.22):

- children do not learn in the same way and are not always interested in learning the same things as everyone else
- learning must be meaningful to each child and relate to what they already know (or are likely to be interested in).

Principle 3: The social and cultural contexts in which children live (the values, expectations, and behavioural and linguistic conventions of families and neighbourhoods and communities of interest) must be meaningfully and respectfully built upon so that learning experiences in the school are relevant. In the NAEYC documents, culture refers to

> *the customary beliefs and patterns of behaviour, both explicit and implicit, that are inculcated by the society - or by a social, religious, or ethnic group within the society - in its members…. all of us are members of cultures and are powerfully influenced by them. Every culture structures and interprets children's behaviour and development in its own way. (NAEYC, 2009, p. 13)*

NAEYC (2009, p. 13) went on to state that

> *Most importantly, educators need to be sensitive to how their own cultural experience shapes their perspective and to realize that multiple perspectives, not just their own, must be considered in decisions about children's development and learning. As children grow up, they need to learn to function well in the society and in the increasingly global economy and to move comfortably amongst groups of people from backgrounds both similar and dissimilar to their own.*

In this study, I discuss the views of the parents and of the GR practitioners and I report on this aspect of their understanding and compare it with the practice of the GR practitioners in their classrooms (see 4.7).

For South Africa, then, DAP not only refers to effective opportunities the GR practitioner provides for children but also the environmental and contextual issues that make learning possible. These are discussed in 2.7.

In conclusion, The GR Practitioner will need to integrate as many aspects of development into her activities as possible: physical, social, emotional, language and cognitive development. As well as planning for the whole class of five year olds, she also needs to make learning meaningful by using practices which are appropriate to the individual child. Children will learn in play, routines, and interest areas, in a carefully planned curriculum that focuses children's attention on a particular concept or topic. She will adapt curriculum to the group she is teaching and to each individual child to promote optimal learning and development (Cooper and Bredekamp, 2009). In addition, she also needs (cited in NAEYC, 2009, pp. 13-23) to create a caring community of learners and to establish reciprocal relationships with families.

2.7 The developmentally appropriate context of learning in GR

In this section, I apply DAP's third principle, the context of the child, to the South African situation in terms of the mesosystem and exosystem of Bronfenbrenner's theory of the ecology of the child. I set this out as an important point because according to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, (Mwamwenda, 1995, p.265 and Khululeka, 2002, p.11), a child who is hungry, thirsty, living in an unhealthy environment, and insecure is not likely to thrive and progress at school.

School environment refers to aspects of the school that contribute to the process of learning and teaching. The environment either provides certain opportunities for children

or fails to do so, and for this reason environmental factors determine to a large extent which 'innate possibilities of children will be realized and to what extent they will be realized' (Gunter, 1990, p.95).

The Systemic Evaluation of 2005 (South Africa DoE, 2005, p.2) identified a number of factors associated with learner achievements. These included socio-economic status, access to information and resources, parental involvement, quality of children participating in the classroom, attendance and discipline. The process of learning and teaching can be made meaningless if nutrition, children's safety, space available, and learning equipment are inadequate in the school environment.

2.7.1 School nutrition

Part of the change in the education system of our country after the end of apartheid was a concern with the welfare of all children, as their basic needs. Amongst the factors that can impair learning are hunger and malnourishment. This is emphasised in the South African Constitution in sections 27, 28 and 29 that deal with children's right of access to sufficient food, right to basic nutrition and right to basic education respectively.

Given the prevalence of poverty in communities across the country, the learning process in school tends to be negatively influenced by factors such as malnutrition and hunger. It was against this background that the democratic government established the National School Nutrition Programme (NSNP) in schools in 1994.

> *...it seeks by providing food and encouraging the establishment of school gardens and the promotion of good nutrition to children and their families, to enhance children's active learning capacity, alleviate short-term hunger, provide an incentive for children to attend school regularly and punctually, as well as to address some of the micronutrient deficiencies that the children may suffer from.*
>
> *(South Africa DoE, 2008c, p.41)*

2.7.2 Safety and security

Schools should be secure and safe places for children and GR practitioners. Without safe and secured environment, the process of learning and teaching will not run smoothly. This refers to school gates, buildings and grounds being managed properly. The toilets as well should be kept clean.

School buildings are an important part in the children's life during school hours. The condition of the school buildings has an effect in the process of learning and teaching. If the school has leaks in the roof when it rains, children might be disturbed during the process of learning. School buildings include roof, roof gutters and down-pipes, walls, windows and doors.

The safety of children at school is guided by the law of delict. The law of delict states that the damage caused by an unlawful act has to be paid by the defendant to the plaintiff (Rousseau, 2004 cited in South Africa DoE, 2008c, p. 30). Schools are therefore accountable for the safety of the children while they are at school.

2.7.3 Space available

The Reception Year classroom is different from Grade 1 classes in many ways. This includes classroom layout. The GR classroom is characterized by different learning areas. These are book corners, a creative area, a fantasy area, and so on. For optimal learning to take place there should be enough space for children to be able to move around freely and to explore different learning areas of interest to them.

The school and parents should to be sensitive to the needs of all the children and, where necessary, the environment should be adapted to enable everyone to take part equally. If a piece of equipment or an activity cannot be sufficiently adapted to allow everyone access, alternate resources should be provided. To allow younger or shyer children to feel emotionally secure, the environment should also be divided into smaller areas where quieter activities can be provided and small groups can play unhindered.

2.7.4 Learning and teaching support material (LTSM)

The process of learning and teaching can take place more easily when appropriate and suitable learning material is available to children and GR practitioners. This material is needed for both inside and outside the classroom, as learning occurs everywhere.

2.7.4.1 Indoor LTSM

Indoor equipment refers to school furniture and all the material children need and use while inside the classroom. Little learning and teaching can take place without LTSM. This includes books, puzzles, visual aids, paper and paints, crayons, chalk, computers, construction toys, games, musical instruments, nets for catching insects outside, measuring tools to measure length, mass, and so on (rulers, scales liquid/dry measuring

sets (cups and spoons), magnets, old radios, and redundant machinery to explore, tools for exploring such as screwdrivers and pliers and scissors and knives.
GR practitioners should use these resources to stimulate children's learning. They should be used to encourage children to think creatively. The availability of relevant learning materials and textbooks is essential for raising the quality of learning and teaching (UNESCO, 2004 cited in South Africa DoE, 2005, p.33).

Children need a safe and supervised environment which is responsive to their needs and provides sufficient space and equipment to encourage the development of gross and fine motor skills. Sufficient toys and equipment should be provided to keep the children occupied and avoid altercations (Irvine, 2010).

2.7.4.2 Outdoor LTSM

The outdoor equipment refers to large permanent pieces of equipment outside the classroom. These should be in a safe and open space, for unstructured activities are important for large muscle development (Irvine, 2010). A well- designed adventure area can facilitate play. Outdoor equipment includes slides, swings, jungle gyms, tyres and so on.

Essa (2003) in her studies showed that there are effects of the pre-primary environment on children's learning and development. Positive peer interaction is promoted when children are not over-crowded, when an ample number and variety of items are available, and when socially oriented materials are provided (Essa, 2003, 178).Children are more productively involved in activities when the purpose of classroom spaces is clearly defined and when materials are developmentally appropriate (ibid).

2.7.5 Attendance

The South African School Act (SASA) states that every parent must cause every child to attend school. The Act, however, refers to children from age of seven until the age of fifteen (Joubert and Prinsloo, 2001, p.232). This means attendance at the Reception Year is not compulsory (South Africa DoE, 1996a). Scheerens 1998 cited in South Africa DoE, 2005, p.49) said that international studies on school effectiveness indicate that regular attendance by both children and teachers is important for learning to take place. This point is important for my observations of the GR classes in Chapter 4, and is relevant to the attitude of parents towards GR and schooling. I report on all of these issues in 4.4.

2.8 Developmentally Appropriate Curriculum: the National Curriculum

While the DAP approach is embedded in the NCS for GR (see Appendix G), it is also important that GR practitioners remain aware of the COs that they intend to achieve so that they better prepare activities of quality. The kinds of questions they ask, for an example, matters in children's development.

The competence of South African children, including GR children, is explained through the Learning Outcomes (LOs) and the Assessment Standards (ASs) outlined in the curriculum documents.

2.8.1 The Foundation Phase (FP) learning programmes

Learning in the Foundation Phase (FP) occurs in an integrated manner. An integrated approach means that the learning matter for the reception year is not taught as separate skills or subjects but linked and presented as a theme that connects most of the activities in the daily timetable (Faber 1997, p.109). Learning in the FP is divided into three learning programmes, namely Literacy, Mathematics and Life Skills.

I have set out a brief synopsis of the range of activities that the GR practitioner needs to offer the children in her class, in Appendix G. These form the basis for my observation schedules in the classroom. I report on them in Chapter 4.

The area of the curriculum with which I am concerned in this study deals with the COs. The Curriculum items set out in Appendix G for Literacy, Numeracy and Life Skills are important for understanding the whole context of teaching in Grade R but they do not form the basis of this research.

The COs, therefore, form the basis for the following section.

2.9 Critical Outcomes: developmentally appropriate teaching methodology

In this section I discuss the COs as part of the DAP, based in the DAP principles (understanding human child development and focusing upon the particular needs and interests of each individual child within the context of teaching and the environment for learning).

The Critical Outcomes, derived from the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, are considered critical for the development of life-long learning, and are expected to inform all teaching and learning. The COs filter through the entire National Curriculum Statement (NCS) and include all of the Learning Outcomes (LOs) and Assessment Standards (AS). It is useful to note, however, that they are described but not implemented in the assessment policy, that is, the LOs are assessed through the ASs (and with CAPS, the content areas are assessed) (South Africa DoE, 2002).

The Critical Outcomes (COs) that frame the NCS give a general guide of what children should achieve. They require the GR practitioner (and all teachers) to provide opportunities for children to actively explore each outcome (Irvine, 2010, 2010a and 2011):

2.9.1 Identify and solve problems and make decisions using critical and creative thinking.

To afford children opportunities to do this, the GR practitioner needs to

- set up opportunities for exploration and investigation by offering objects, books and activities for children to engage with
- ask open questions (such as 'What will happen if…'; Why, do you think, does…', 'How will you do that?')
- enable and to encourage children to explore and investigate within safety guidelines, while ensuring that children know that exploring, investigating and asking questions are good practices when carried out under the safety guidelines.

2.9.2 Work effectively with others as members of a team, group, organisation and community.

To afford children opportunities to practice this, the GR practitioner needs to set up activities where children can

- work alone, without interference from others, or interfering with others
- play next to each other without interfering with each other's play and work

- work with another child to achieve a task
- play in a small group together to achieve the task of the play
- play in the large plenary group of the whole class
- manage conflict at the relevant level with the GR practitioner's help.

2.9.3 Organise and manage themselves and activities responsibly and effectively

To afford children opportunities to practice this, the GR practitioner needs to set up activities where children can

- put away their own belongings in the designated space
- plan what they want to do and how they will do it
- gather together the materials that they will need
- carry out the activity
- reflect upon the activity in an appropriate way according to age and stage and own interest
- clear up the space and materials ready for the next child to use it

2.9.4 Collect, analyse, organise and critically evaluate information

To afford children opportunities to practice this, the GR practitioner needs to set up activities where children can

- be motivated (by the GR practitioner as well as intrinsically – from within by interest) to explore the topic
- ask questions about the topic and gather the information from the answers
- engage with the topic in an active way (for example, to pick a leaf, look at it, smell it, feel it)
- listen to information from adults such as stories, from books, from conversations
- analyse (that is, talk about the key factors and issues) the information the child is receiving
- organise the information by comparing, arranging, drawing, acting out, singing about the information, and so on
- decide if and how the information is important for herself at this time (for example, her safety, her interests and her developmental needs). This means that the GR practitioner will need to engage the child or children by asking open questions, telling them information when they need it (and not for 'examination purposes'), but she will have to make sure that she does this by keeping the child's interest in the topic.

2.9.5 C*ommunicate effectively using visual, symbolic and/or language skills in various modes*

To afford children opportunities to practice this, the GR practitioner needs to set up activities where children can

- speak freely to each other and to the adults, using the appropriate and accepted manners of the families and neighbourhood and school (this includes being able to ask questions politely, although this may be considered an unacceptable thing to do within each family)
- listen carefully to others including children and adults. This includes not only complex instructions, but also in conversation
- 'read' not only her own name and perhaps the names of others, but also to recognise key words in the environment (environmental print), and to 'read' body language in others
- 'write' not only her own name and to copy key words, but also to record her experiences in her daily life through visual and dramatic art activities, movement and music
- reason by explaining what steps the children are taking to work out activity steps and choices.

This CO is inked closely to the assessment standards in the NCS (or 'content' in CAPS).

2.9.6 Use Science and Technology effectively and critically showing responsibility towards the environment and the health of others.

Scientific process skills are defined as 'the process of enquiry which involves observing, comparing, classifying, measuring, experimenting, and communicating'. Technological process skills are defined as 'investigate, design, make, evaluate, communicate' (South Africa DoE 2011a, p. 2.3) and technology includes tools and equipment and implements which help us to carry these actions. To afford children opportunities to practice this, the GR practitioner needs to set up activities where children can

- experiment with what they are learning through the topics presented to them (for example, working out why objects float or sink)
- experiment by using all sorts of appropriate tools ranging from pencils, crayons, pens, scissors, knives, forks, spoons, puppets, dress-up clothes, pots, pans and gardening tools, and implements for working with sand, water such as sticks, leaves, and natural objects
- work with mechanical equipment such as scales and rulers for measuring, magnifying glasses and binoculars and so on

- work with electronic equipment such as telephones, cell phones, and computers.

2.9.7 Demonstrate an understanding of the world as a set of related systems by recognising that problem solving contexts do not exist in isolation.

To afford children opportunities to practice this, the GR practitioner needs to set up activities where children can

- remind each other of previous topics and discussions and their links to the present topic of discussion (through questions and statements from the GR practitioner)
- make links through open questions, of present experiences and activities with past and future activities (as in 'Do you remember what happened when we …?' and 'Why do you think insects are important for the world? Do you remember what we learned about fish last week?').

These examples will form the basis of the observations I make in my data collection together with the interviews with the GR practitioners to make meaning of the observations. I report on them in Chapter 4.

In the following section, I address the roles and responsibilities of parents and GR practitioners in developing the competences of their children.

2.10 Parent's roles and responsibilities in GR

Children cannot be understood outside the context of their families.
(Connard and Novick, 1996).

I defined the term 'parent' in 2.2.3. Parents, in my own experience as a teacher, do not necessarily view schooling in the same way as teachers. Informal conversations I have held with parents over time reveal that some parents do not value the importance of early childhood education in that they send their children to pre-schools because of the availability of food, or to provide their children with a safe environment while they are at work, rather than because they have an appreciation of the importance of good quality ECD programmes. Also, parents and caregivers are often unable to provide adequate physical and psycho-social support to their young children due to the parent's illness from diseases like HIV and AIDS/TB. ECD programmes in such contexts become a relief to the parents.

2.10.1 The importance of parents being involved in GR

Parents contribute to their children's learning. Parents are children's first teachers and have a life-long influence on children's values (Connard and Novick, 1996, p.13). Cotton and Wikelund (2001 cited in South Africa DoE, 2005, p.55) were of the opinion that the more the parents are involved in their children's learning the more beneficial the achievements are. Some of the factors of parental involvement in their children's education are:

- the amount and nature of support that parents give
- the ability of parents to provide support needed by children and
- ways in which parents interact with the school.

Studies (cited in Pugh, 1996, p. 95) have shown that children's learning depends on their interests and motivation. By knowing children's interests intimately, staff and parents are together able to provide for, intervene in and extend children's learning according to individual needs and wishes, and not according to the adults' hierarchical, content-based idea of what should be learned next (Pugh, 1996, p.95).

The African Union Charter on Children's Rights also requires that

> *Parents or other persons responsible for the child shall have the primary responsibility of the upbringing and development (of) the child….*
>
> *(African Union,1990, p. 20.1)*

Epstein (cited in Berger, 2000, p.5) said that research findings show that the main reason for a child's success or lack of success in school is not socio-economic status but the caring support and encouragement given by parents. This is in line with what Bronfenbrenner noted about the child needing at least one caring individual in her life (see 2.5). Carol (1999, p.270) however, was of the opinion that while some variations in children's learning and development is the result of choices made by parents and teachers, other differences result from the opportunities and understandings, or lack of them, or a gap between the understandings by parents and teachers. This calls for teachers and GR practitioners to organise parental knowledge of all aspects of GR.

2.10.2 Challenges facing parents

Although many schools often invest a considerable amount of time in communicating with parents, most communication between home and school tends to be one-way: from the school to the home (Lemmer and van Wyk, 2004, p.183). Therefore, actual parent involvement remains weak (Heystek and Louw cited in Lemmer and van Wyk, 2004).

Alexander, (cited in Lemmer and van Wyk, 2004, p.185) emphasised that to implement effective parental involvement, schools and families should jointly produce written policies. These should be regularly revised and distributed to all families.

But this may not be enough. The 'gap' between home and GR may be much wider than this:

> *…there is far more to child development than pre-school, and that if the school system is not congruent with home circumstances, the children will have to make immense efforts to achieve any form of success*
>
> *(Cohen, 2002, p.7 cited in Nsamenang, 2006).*

It may be that parenting style is a most important influence on child development. Levy (cited in Carol, 2004, p.19) was of the opinion that beliefs about how children learn and how they should be taught, influence the types of opportunities parents provide for their children.

But at times it happens that parents are at a distance from the child even in providing for their child's basic needs. Parents themselves are confronted with numerous problems of their own, which prevent their full or even part-involvement (Smit and Liebenberg-Siebrits, 2001, p.129). This is evident in Mdantsane where some of the parents stay away from their children for about a week at a time due to employment conditions.

Wells also noted (cited in Myhill, Jones and Hopper 2005, p. 9) that scaffolding children's learning in the classroom, for the teacher, is not the same as for the parent at home. Wells was of the opinion that parent-child interactions are more supportive and developmental than those found in teacher-child conversation in the classroom. He found that (cited in Myhill *et al,* 2005, p.86) parents extended children's thinking, attempted to understand their misunderstandings, and helped establish connections far more that teachers did. This means that parents usually have to work out what the child means in conversations at home, but in school the child has to work out what the teacher means. I note however, that Myhill *et al.* were discussing the situation in Britain, and the context will not necessary be the same as for Mdantsane. I explore this aspect in 4.4.

In addition to that, New and Mallory (cited in Carol, 1999, p.271) claimed that parents may think differently about child development, children's learning and the meaning of school. That raises a question of whether parents are informed enough about children's

development and if so what information they have gathered. If there is not dialogue between the parents and the school, there may be lot of contradictions and inefficiency in children's learning between home and school. I have gathered information on this challenge in my research (see 4.6).

For parents to be able to support schooling means that they need to know exactly what it is for: the purpose of GR and the learning programme which is offered (see Appendix G). I discuss this in the findings in 4.4 and 4.5.

This discussion leads to the next section where roles and responsibilities of GR practitioners are discussed.

2.11 GR Practitioner's roles and responsibilities

Many behaviours are expected of the GR practitioner. These expectations come mainly from the NCS (see Appendix G), and others from our own expectations of teachers in schools.

The primary role of the GR practitioner is to provide places and materials with which children can play, either alone, with one other or with a group of other children in a cooperative way (South Africa DoE 2008a, p.25). The GR practitioner makes sure that the material is in good condition and she supervises all the time and explains any potential danger to the class (Davin and van Staden, 2005, p.7). Above all the provision of materials the GR practitioner also listens carefully to what the children say and where they focus to find 'teachable moments' or 'critical incidents' (Ibid).

Children's learning is central to real life experiences. The child's understanding 'is constantly interacting with the perceived real world and adjusting itself to it (Barnes cited in Myhill *et al.,* 2006, p.52).Traditionally, the GR practitioner's responsibility is to enable connections to be made between the new and the already known. One way of doing that is for the teacher to offer exploratory teaching, making use of open-ended questions, rather than heavy use of transmission teaching and factual questions or convergent questions (ibid, p.85). In that way the GR practitioner will be providing children with developmentally appropriate opportunities. This links to the COs which I have discussed in 2.9 above.

The GR Practitioner helps children to develop and to learn by observing what is it that each child needs at that moment for their own development and by planning what activities will best meet this need right now, which will be fun, relevant and meaningful to the child. It is important that the GR practitioner record each child's progress and interests and share this information with the family of each child.

The GR practitioner spends four hours everyday time with young children during the school term. She makes decisions everyday about the process of learning and teaching. Her decisions determine whether what actually happens in a classroom is or is not developmentally appropriate. With the use of DAP and the COs, GR practitioners are required to structure activities around the needs of the growing, individual children. Copple and Bredekamp (2009) made the following points about the GR practitioner being able to implement DAP (within the American context):

- DAP does not mean children must only take part in easy activities (also noted by Davin and van Staden, 2005, p.22). Rather, it means ensuring that goals and experiences are suited to their learning and development and challenging enough to promote their progress and interest
- learning and development are most likely to occur when new experiences build on what a child already knows and is able to do and when those experiences also entail the child 'stretching' her abilities a reasonable amount in acquiring new skills, abilities, or knowledge
- after the child reaches that new level of mastery in skill or understanding, the effective teacher reflects on what goals should come next; and the cycle continues, advancing the child's learning in a developmentally appropriate way.

GR practitioners, however, have difficulty in providing children with effective learning opportunities. There is a wide discrepancy between what DAP looks like on paper and how children are actually taught. The studies by Taylor and Vinjevold (1999, p.143) on teaching practices in South African primary schools showed that the following practices were commonly observed:

- lessons are dominated by teacher talk and low-level questions
- lessons are generally characterized by lack of structure, and the absence of activities which promote higher order skills such as investigation, understanding relationships, and curiosity (that is, the COs)
- real world examples are often used, but at a very superficial level

- little group work or other interaction occurs between pupils
- little reading and writing is done by pupils. When it is, it is of a rudimentary kind.

I have also observed these practices in Intermediate Phase classes. But the practices are relevant to even GR. To what extent these practices are mastered in GR is of interest to me as it is the basis for this study.

The study by (South Africa DoE 2008a, p.77) showed that the GR practitioners knew what their roles and responsibilities are. Lack of support and monitoring from the schools; the lack of knowledge in the schools as to the purpose of the Reception Year; the lack of implementation of the NCS by all parties in the schools and the lack of regular support and monitoring by the circuit managers and district ECD personnel hampered them in carrying out, or performing their competence.

As I discussed in 2.3, the policies are in place and I intend observing the level of implementation in the three GR classrooms. The next section discusses challenges facing the Reception Year.

2.12 Challenges within the Reception Year Programme

While there has been policy activity around ECD development and GR (especially in terms of the NCS and CAPS), research is said not to have kept pace with these developments (Luxomo 2009, p.12). The failure to implement legislation and to successfully fulfil government commitments reflects a general struggle within Government to give practical effect to the ideals it has set itself (Children's Institute 2003, p.4). Implementation has been slow at all levels, particularly at local government level where human and other resources are often lacking, with no collaboration between government and civil society (ibid). The GR year is faced with a large number of challenges and demands which Niehaus *et al.(*cited in Smit and Liebenberg-Siebrits, 2001, p.122) said, affects the teacher-child relationship. In this section I discuss three areas of concern: the budget for GR; GR practitioner training and support for GR classes within the school.

2.12.1 Budget

In May/June 2000 the Department of Education conducted a Nation-wide Audit of ECD. This was the first large scale survey of ECD provision in SA. The findings showed that only 23% of five and six year olds received a subsidy, which represents only 4% of the total child population of five and six year olds (South Africa DoE, 2001b).This reflects the historical lack of support for ECD.

Since 1995, the DoE began considering GR as part of the school system in its policy provision. That culminated in the White Paper 5 in 2001 which recognized the limited funding available for ECD. The plan based on the policy was to include GR on an incremental basis, which means the DoE would subsidise more children.

There are, however, still problems regarding funding of GR. Full support is not given to GR. Schools that qualify for GR funding receive the equivalent of 70% of what is spent on Grade 1 (South Africa DoE, 2008d). The schools, therefore, must depend on the leadership in each school to produce quality results.

GR practitioners are mainly faced with the challenge of not being recognized by society itself as being equal in status or importance to primary school educators. GR practitioners are entitled to a salary scale for an educator on Relative Education Qualification Values (REQV) Level 10. They are paid a Basic Conditions of Service stipend, which is currently R5000 per month. This is less than a Grade 1 teacher currently earns (South Africa DoE, 2001a, section3.2.32). That alone makes them feel less important than teachers in primary and secondary levels. They are entitled to minimum wages and certain working conditions as laid in the Basic Conditions of Employment Act. In practice the protection of the Act is not afforded to many ECD educators (South Africa DoSD 2005, p.18).

2.12.2 GR practitioner training

Training of GR practitioners is a concern. During the Apartheid era in South Africa, ECD was not valued for all children. In fact, child development was closely and solely linked

to women. Women were seen as guardians of young children with the special role of teaching moral and cultural issues. The place of women was seen to be in the home. The field of ECD has been staffed by a predominance of women constituting about 95% of GR practitioners (Cunningham cited in Essa, 2003, p.102).

There were, however, no registered qualifications for pre-primary teachers other than those offered by the colleges of education and some universities for teachers who would be employed in formal school and in particular government schools (Ibid.) This resulted in the ECD sector being deprived of qualified GR practitioners until the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) was established in 1996.

In South Africa, training and support programmes specifically designed for ECD practitioners, including GR, are at present offered only at the Level 04 and Level 05 on the National Qualifications Framework (NQF). White Paper 5 stipulates that ECD practitioners are 'qualified' at Level 04. The Level 04 course is at the level of a Senior School-leaving Certificate. This compares unfavourably with professional teacher education which requires a four year degree after the Senior School- leaving Certificate (SAQA 2006). The qualification enables the GR practitioners to work under supervision of a professional educator (South Africa DoE, 2008a, p.28).

In 2006 the Eastern Cape Province instituted a programme to qualify, at Level 04, ECD practitioners who work in GR classrooms attached to schools. The programme was implemented from 2007 to 2009. The South African Council of Educators has made provision for the registration of all ECD practitioners[3] with a Level 04 ECD qualification (SACE, 2004).

GR practitioners therefore require capacity–building. Additionally, GR practitioners are not valued equally with the educators in primary schools. NAPTOSA believed the recognition and credibility of ECD starts with professional qualifications.

> *ECD cannot be allowed to be perceived as a kind of 'add-on' to existing provision of education with inferior qualifications and less stringent demands and responsibilities (which are not really education). It must be 'added in' to the system and be subjected to all the same requirements, criteria and quality management processes as every other part of the system. (NAPTOSA 2001)*

[3] This term includes GR practitioners and all those practitioners' who work with children from birth to the age of four.

The Executive Director of the S.A. Congress for ECD (cited in the National Audit Report of ECD 2001 said

> *the situation is a crying need. The need for qualified teachers at this stage of a child's development will be the best reward we can give our children.*

In agreeing with this, Darling–Hammond &Young, (2002, cited in South Africa Department of Education 2004) said that the educator's credentials, experience, and years of education make a difference to learner achievement. The Final Report of the ECD Pilot Project cited in (South Africa DoE 2001a, 3.1.1.27.5) pointed out that there is a lack of knowledge, skills and training of teachers to implement the GR programme effectively.

The same report, however, says there is little performance of competence visible in the classroom (ibid). Teachers interviewed in that report cited lack of support from the District Officials as the cause of incompetent performance. This is also supported by the White Paper 5 (South Africa DoE, 2001a, p.20) as it cited lack of educational and teacher support, inadequate provision of facilities, infrastructure and assistive devices.

In addition Hodgskiss (2007) in her study revealed that GR practitioners did not have the knowledge or skills to implement the new curriculum as stipulated in the NCS policy document. The reason for this was that the Department of Education has presented numerous workshops on the implementation of Outcomes-Based Education (OBE) for teachers but none on how to implement the new approach to literacy in the Foundation Phase.

2.12.3 Support for the GR practitioner in the schools

When teachers are as under-qualified as the GR practitioners, it seems to be important to give as much support as possible to them. The findings from the 2008 study: Readiness of the Department for the Reception Year carried out by the Department of Education showed that:

- the Department at all levels was not yet ready for roll out of the GR programme, since regular monitoring and support programmes were not yet

in place. As a result, GR practitioners were not able to carry out their roles and responsibilities as they have been taught

- the schools were not yet ready for roll out of the GR programme, since informed monitoring and support programmes were not yet in place. As a result, GR practitioners were not able to carry out their roles and responsibilities as they have been taught, and the children were not benefiting from a competent programme
- the Foundation Phase was not yet ready for the GR programme, since informed monitoring and support programmes were not yet in place. As a result, GR practitioners were not able to carry out their roles and responsibilities as they have been taught
- Level 04 GR practitioners require support and monitoring from within the school itself and from within the District ECD specialists. While support visits from the service providers are important, and necessary from the point of view of support for the training programme, this is not sufficient for the well-being of the children, families and GR practitioner, and therefore not sufficient for the well-being of the school.
- the well-being of children is compromised by lack of a strongly stable and regular feeding scheme, support for psychomotor development, socio-affective development and cognitive development. Building of synapses in the brains of children is not at optimum level.

(South Africa Department of Education 2008b)

School principals have sole responsibility for staff training programmes, both school based and externally directed, and to assist teachers, particularly new and inexperienced teachers, in developing and achieving educational objectives in accordance with needs of the school. Roles and responsibilities of the HOD include provision and co-ordinating guidance on the latest approaches to the subject, method, techniques, evaluation, LTSM and so on in their field, and convey these effectively to the staff members concerned (ELRC, 2003).

School principals are responsible for GR practitioners being aprt of staff training programmes and that all teachers are also knowledgeable about GR programmes.

In this section I have set out some of the challenges facing the GR practitioner in the schools and as part of the Department of Basic Education. I conclude this chapter with a summary of the ground covered.

2.13 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have outlined the context of the GR classes in the Eastern Cape in terms of the environment in which children develop and learn, ECD and national curriculum policies and the outcomes of the Annual National Assessments (ANA) undertaken in primary schools. I have related this to Bronfenbrenner's theory of the Ecology of the Child and to the theory of DAP.

I have looked at the history and current nature of the Reception Year in South Africa, based as they are in child development theories. I have considered policies aimed at ensuring the survival and development of children. The responsibility of the Reception Year in making sure that children's cognitive, physical, socio-emotional and spiritual development is effectively grounded so that children learn with ease and pleasure has been discussed especially in terms of the COs.

The challenge for the Reception Year as the preparatory stage for the formal education system is to ensure that children develop specific competences for Grade 1 and beyond. The role the GR classes are playing in achieving COs in terms of practice has also been discussed.

This chapter has also looked at how GR practitioners are at a distance from professional educators as they seem not to receive the due recognition they deserve in terms of money and professional recognition.

Against this background, I discuss in the next chapter the research paradigm and methodology I use in my investigation of provision of effective learning opportunities in the three GR classes in Mdantsane.

Chapter 3 Research Methodology

3.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter I discussed some key concepts relating to ECD with particular reference to teaching and learning in the Reception Year (GR). In this chapter I explain the methodology used in gathering the information required in this study. Firstly I restate the research purpose and then I define the paradigm under which the study is conducted. I give the rationale for choosing a case study as my method, and describe its basic components. Then I explain the research methods I employ in gathering data and their limitations. In concluding this section I reflect on the ethics of doing research.

I begin this research process by reminding the reader of the purpose, objectives and research questions.

3.2 The Research Purpose, Objectives and Questions

As I indicated in the previous chapter, the research problem that challenges me is the quality of the learning opportunities offered in GR classes to enable developmentally appropriate opportunities for developing the use of the Critical Outcomes in the National Curriculum Statement.

The purpose of this study therefore is to explore the extent to which young children are exposed to developmentally appropriate opportunities for learning in order to achieve the COs as outlined in the South African National School Curriculum.

The objectives of this research are to gain insight into

1. ways in which parents perceive
    a. their children's developmental needs and
    b. their own role in this as well as the role of GR practitioner in providing developmentally appropriate activities
2. ways in which GR practitioners implement, through their teaching methodology, the ECD curriculum in a developmentally appropriate way
3. the competences that young children in the GR programmes achieve with regard to the National Curriculum Statement and the COs in particular
4. ways in which GR services are supported within the schools.

The research questions follow on from the objectives and assist in meeting the purpose of this study. They are

1. What do parents perceive to be their own children's developmental needs, their understanding of Developmentally Appropriate Practice and their and the GR practitioner' roles in supporting their children's development?
2. How do GR practitioners perceive children's developmental needs and their own roles in implementing DAP?
3. How do GR practitioners implement the methodology of the COs?
4. What do children do and learn while they attend GR classes?
5. What support do the GR classes receive within the school in implementing DAP and the COs?

In answering these research questions it is important to explain the paradigm which supports the whole study. In the next section, therefore, I discuss the research paradigm into which the study 'fits'.

3.3 Research Paradigm

A paradigm is

> *a term deriving from the history of science, where it was used to describe a cluster of beliefs and dictates that for scientists in a particular discipline influence what should be studied, how research should be done and how results should be interpreted*
>
> *(Bryman, 2008, p. 542).*

The Oxford Dictionaries (no date) in turn, briefly defined a paradigm as 'a typical example or pattern of something; a pattern or model, and a world view underlying the theories and methodology of a particular scientific subject'. Our worldview is defined, it seems to me, by our knowledge, skills, and values (attitudes and behaviours).

Before I explain the paradigm which I adopt for this study, I clarify briefly what I mean by these terms(behaviours; values; assumptions; beliefs; concepts) used in the two brief definitions above by referring to the ideas on organisational culture put forward by Schein (cited in Value-Based Management.net no date). He stated that our behaviours (practices) are formed by our values, which in turn are formed by our assumptions or beliefs about the world. Our beliefs are formed from our experiences and from the concepts we form about the world.

First of all, as I noted in Section 2.2, a **concept** is an idea which we 'take into our mind'. An example of a concept in this study is the idea of ECD, or of what a child is or what a GR practitioner is. A concept consists of our basic knowledge about an issue.

A **belief** is an idea or concept which we accept exists and is true, even if there is no evidence for it (Oxford Dictionaries no date). In this study, I define a belief as an assumption: 'something that one accepts as true or real(Ibid.). It is often an unstated (and also unconscious) belief in the way the world is or should be (Butler, 2011). An example of a belief or an assumption in this study is that we believe that children develop according to theories of human development. We need to clarify our beliefs or assumptions because they inform our behaviour.

A **value**, on the other hand, is an idea which we believe is important or worth something or useful (Oxford Dictionaries). It states what we believe to be good and right, and which we use to live our lives by. Values are also often unstated and unconscious. An example of a value in this study is that of children's rights. We believe that this set of values in the South African Constitution is good and right.

Our beliefs or assumptions and values inform our attitudes and therefore our behaviours and practices. In this study, an example of the relationship between our beliefs and assumptions, our values and our practices would be as follows: we believe in the idea of developmentally appropriate practice, we value children's rights, we understand the concepts of each and we may or may not show them in our behaviours and in our practices.

I have already defined the concepts and beliefs surrounding the key terms in this study (see 2.2). The methods that I describe and use assist me to uncover the beliefs/assumptions and the behaviours/practices of the GR practitioners regarding their own methodology in the classroom.

I briefly analyse the beliefs and values, assumptions, concepts and practices of the paradigm in the following section.

3.3.1 The Interpretive Paradigm

For the purposes of this research, I have chosen to use the Interpretivist approach, one of two major points of view or beliefs which differ fundamentally from one another. These are positivist research, and Interpretive research (Cohen *et al,* 2000). I describe the Interpretivist approach in terms of both the Interpretivist and the Positivist approaches.

With positivist research the outcomes are expressed as universal laws or generalisations (Cohen *et al.,* 2000, p.8). This I found not a suitable approach for this study as I collect information from only three classrooms.

In addition, one of positivism's key beliefs is that the social sciences must use the same methods or practices as the natural sciences. A positivist approach ignores all human values, individual assumptions and perceptions (ibid). In this study I intend to collect only data which is based in the context of individual behaviours, and interpretations of that behaviour. GR practitioners are expected to share their own understanding of child development and justification for their own practice.

According to Bhengu (2005, p.61), positivists seek to predict, control and explain, while interpretivists seek mutual understanding. I cannot predict in general for GR within the FP, nor can I have control over what I observe. I have no control whatsoever over the GR practitioners or schools. I can only observe and report for this small study. On the other hand, Iseek to understand, together with the GR practitioners, by asking questions about what I saw, and by reporting my own interpretations to them for further discussion.

The interpretive research approach focuses on experiences of the world based on the culture (concepts, beliefs, values as well as behaviours, according to Schein cited in Value-Based Management.net) and previous experiences of each individual.

> *We see the world not as it is, but as we are. What we see is always filtered by our own experiences, our background and our position in the world' (Hitchcock and Hughes, 1995, p.310).*

Therefore individual interpretations and understanding define the theory behind learning and teaching in the respective sites. All of the data that I collect is seen through my own eyes, as well as through the eyes of the respondents (see the section on participant observation in 3.7.2.1)

Interpretive research also concerns itself with the individual cases rather than universal laws (Cohen *et al.*, 2000, p.22). And according to Janse van Rensburg*et al.* (2003, p.16), the interpretive paradigm is concerned with individuals and small groups in natural settings rather than aiming at generalisations. That means that I will need to observe children playing and learning and to interpret my findings for the investigated sites only. As Neuman (1997, p.68) wrote:

> *In general the interpretive approach is the systematic analysis of socially meaningful action through the direct detailed observation of people in natural settings in order to arrive at understanding and interpretation of how people create and maintain their social worlds.*

I have therefore followed the interpretive paradigm in this study. This paradigm is characterised by a belief in a concern for the individual and an attempt to understand the subjective world of human experience (Cohen *et al.*, 2000, p. 22).

The characteristics of the interpretive paradigm are that it acknowledges the subjectivity of both the research subjects and the researcher (Cohen *et al.,* 2000, p.22). I found this research paradigm, therefore, more desirable for this study as I seek to understand the subjective knowledge and experience of my respondents as far as learning and teaching is concerned in the GR classes. According to Neuman (1997, p.68), through observation, actions and behaviours can show participants' understanding of key concepts and values and their perceptions. Choosing this paradigm facilitates the achievement of the objectives of this study.

3.3.2 Limitations within the interpretive paradigm

Like other paradigms, however, the interpretive paradigm has its limitations. One of these limitations is that assumptions may not be made conscious for analysing by the researcher. Ruddock (cited in Cohen *et al.,* 2000, p.120) was of the opinion that qualitative methodologies are criticized for being *'impressionistic, biased, common place, insignificant, ungeneralizable, idiosyncratic, subjective and short-sighted'*. That calls for caution with regard to bias, as the researcher is always part of the research when he interacts with the respondents. Neuman (1997, p.70) said that *'individual motives are crucial to consider, even if they are irrational, carry deep emotions and contain false facts and prejudices'.* That cautions the researcher to guard against subjectivity and bias in interpreting reality.

In this study, therefore, I have ensured that the respondents and I understand each other's views of life and of key terms and actions. I have ensured this by asking probing questions (see 3.7.1).

The characteristics of the interpretive paradigm noted above mean that I am using a qualitative approach to this study.

3.4 Qualitative Research

The word 'qualitative' means that something ismeasured by the quality of something (for example, size, appearance, value) rather than by its quantity(Oxford Dictionaries). In this research it means that the data collection methods are chosen to capture the experience and understanding of research subjects. It concerns itself mainly with explanation of why things are the way they are and why people act the way they do (Hancock 2005, p.1). Questions of 'why', 'how', and 'in what way' are of paramount importance.

Qualitative research explores phenomena in their natural settings and uses many methods to interpret, understand, explain and bring meaning to them (Anderson, 2002, p.119). Qualitative research refers to subjective methodology in collecting data. Its purpose is to seek to understand people's interpretation by focusing on the complete picture (Ibid.).

3.5 Methodology

It is a theory that decides what can be observed (Albert Einstein).

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The term 'methodology' according to Walker (1985, p.45) refers to the '*logic of (the) methods*' one uses. Thus it does not only refer to techniques and procedures used in the process of data gathering, but it also provides reasons for using these techniques. As the United States Treasury Enterprise Architecture Framework (2000) put it, methodology is '*a documented approach for performing activities in a coherent, consistent, accountable and repeatable manner'.*

Kaplan noted (Cohen *et al.,* 2000, p.45) that the aim of methodology is to help us to understand, in the broadest possible terms, not the products of scientific inquiry but the process itself. Neuman (1997, p.2) looked at it as the guiding principle by which the research may find out something 'new and original'.

This also means to me that I need to explain

- why and how I use the research design and methods
- how I use interview and observation methods to gather information
- how I analyse the information I have gathered
- how I document all of the data that I gather into a separate file of evidence.

In this study I need first therefore to justify why I use this methodology and why I use these methods. I have done this partly already (see 3.3 where I have justified the use of the interpretive paradigm) and I continue in the following section where I discuss the research design of the case study.

Because this study is qualitative, it follows that the methodology will be qualitative as well (see 3.4 above). Hitchcock and Hughes (1995, p.12) defined qualitative methodology as

> *approaches that enable researchers to learn at first hand, about the social world they are investigating by means of involvement and participation in that world through focus on what individual actors say or do.*

This means that I, the researcher, must pay close attention to what ordinarily and routinely happens in the classroom and at the school at large.

The study takes the form of a qualitative case study.

3.6 Research Design: A Case Study

> *A case study is a method for learning about a complex instance, based on a comprehensive understanding of that instance obtained by extensive description and analysis of that instance taken as a whole and in its context. (USGAO, 1990, p.15)*

Research design refers to structuring a research project in order to define a set of questions (Trochim 2006). It refers to the strategy used to integrate the different components of a research project in a cohesive and coherent way.
The overall research design for this investigation is that of a case study.

3.6.1 An Illustrative Case Study

The quotation above notes that a case study focuses in detail upon a particular issue from within but also within its context. Yin (1994 cited in Anderson, 2002, p.153) also defined a case study as an inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context. Adelman *et al.*(cited in Cohen *et al.,* 2000, p.181) described a case

study as the study of '*an instance in action'* and Hancock (2005, p.6) defined a case study as *'in-depth consideration of one case by means of investigation'*. The case study tries to shed light onto the specific practice of the case rather than to generalise about the whole issue. By this I understand a case study here to be a detailed study of three selected GR classes, rather than the whole population of GR learning sites in Mdantsane.

This case study therefore explores the role that three GR practitioners play within their own contexts, in providing young children in Mdantsane with developmentally appropriate learning opportunities and activities to promote the COs.

There are various types of case studies (Writing@CSU no date). This study uses a descriptive or illustrative case study. A descriptive case study 'presents a detailed account of the phenomenon under study' (Merriam, 1998, p.38). The phenomenon here is the use of Developmentally Appropriate Practice and Critical Outcomes in the curriculum.

This illustrative case study describes one or two examples of an event to show what the situation is like. Illustrative case studies*'serve primarily to make the unfamiliar familiar and to give readers a common language about the topic in question' (*Writing@CSU no date). The case to be studied, according to Hitchcock and Hughes (1995, p.320), is selected for what it can tell the researcher in terms of the research questions posed. The research questions posed in this piece of research focus upon teaching methods used to enhance learning in GR.

Cohen *et al.*(2000, p.182) suggested many further case study characteristics and following are some that I found relevant to this study:

- It is concerned with a rich description of events relevant to the case
- It has geographical parameters or boundaries
- It focuses on individual actors and seeks to understand their perceptions of events
- The researcher is integrally involved in the case.

I have identified boundaries for this case study as follows: these are

- a detailed description of the parents, GR practitioners working within the GR classes and Heads of Department, together with the children in the GR classes
- in three Foundation Phase schools

- in Unit 8 of Mdantsane, all of which feed the Senior Primary school in which I teach
- Since I am a teacher at the Senior Primary school in question, and also the primary interpreter in this study, I am closely involved in the research. I discuss my own role as participant researcher in more detail in section 3.7.2.1.

3.6.2 A Case Study with Multiple Sites

I have noted above that I will focus on three separate sites in this case study. Yin (1994, p. 41) noted that 'the same case study may involve more than one unit of analysis. This occurs when, within a single case, attention also is given to a subunit or subunits'.

I have chosen three sites in this case study to act as sub-units in this study. I interview and observe GR classes in each FP school and summarise the findings in each one in the context of its own school. I then use all of the findings to make conclusions in relation to the research purpose, objectives and questions.

3.6.3 Using the Advantages of a Case Study

One of the advantages of the case study is that it has an ability to study a situation within its context: as Cohen *et al.*, 2000, p.181 and Anderson (2002, p.153) said, it stresses the holistic examination of a phenomenon without separating it from the larger context to which it relates.

Case studies therefore provide a unique study of real people in real situations, enabling readers to understand ideas more clearly than simply by representing them by means of abstract theories or principles (Adelman *et al*, cited in Cohen *et al.,* 2000, p.181). In this study, it is hoped that the data collected will give a clear indication of whether the policies around GR are reflected in practice in the three selected classrooms.

In favour of the case study, Anderson (2002, p.159) stated that case studies incorporate a *'chain-of-evidence'* so that the reader can follow the analysis and come to the stated conclusion. The case study, therefore, must focus upon internal validity. This means that I will need to use 'thick description' gathered through detailed observations, interviews and field notes. I discuss this in detail in Section 3.7and respond to it in Chapter 5.

3.6.4 Working with Case Study Limitations

The researcher as the primary instrument in data collection might not be thoroughly trained for observation and interviews. In that case she is left to rely on her own instincts and ability throughout the research (Reis, no date). I will have to ensure that I know as much as possible about these methods before going into the field. I discuss the methods in detail in Sections 3.7.1, 3.7.2 and 3.7.3.

The researcher also needs to be cautious about generalisability. Even though case studies try to show 'what it is like' to be in a particular situation, to catch the close-up reality and 'thick description' of participants' own experiences of, thoughts about, and feelings for a situation (Geertz,1973 cited in Cohen *et al*., 2000, p.182), the case under study is not necessarily representative of similar cases. Therefore the results of the research are not generalisable (Hancock 2005, p.7). I will have to be careful not to generalise from this research to include all GR classes in NU8, or in Mdantsane, let alone in the Eastern Cape Province or across South Africa. I deal with this issue in Chapter 5: Conclusions and Recommendations.

Case studies are also criticised for their lack of reliability (Anderson, 2002, p.159). This means that another researcher may come to different conclusions on the same phenomenon studied. I will have to make sure that I write down in detail all data I collect from the interviews and observations that I make so that I can achieve credibility.

In addition, doing a case study can be costly in terms of the time required for interviews and observations (Writing@CSU no date). I will need to ensure that I can take enough time from my own teaching to be able to observe during the school day (GR classes typically begin at 08h00 and finish by 12h00). I can do no observations when I am free from my own teaching responsibilities. This may be problematic, given that the principal of my school does not easily give her teachers time away from responsibilities. I comment on this in Chapters 4 and 5.

Having discussed the case study as my research design, I now deal with the methods I will use for organising the collection of gathering information.

3.7 Methods

Methods refer to 'the range of approaches used in educational research to gather data which is to be used as a basis for inference and interpretation, for explanation and prediction' (Cohen *et al.,* 2000, p.44). The methods which I use are interviews and observations. In this next section I explain their use in this study and then go on to defining ways in which I will deal with the information I gather.

3.7.1 Semi-Structured Interviews

The interview is a prime source of case study data (Anderson, 2002, p.155). It is a

> communication between two or more persons used for purposes such as diagnosis, education or obtaining information'. He added that it is a 'highly purposeful task which goes beyond mere conversation (Anderson, 2002, p.190).

Interviews enable participants to discuss their interpretations of the world in which they live, and to express how they regard situations from their own point of view (Cohen *et al.,* 2000, p.267). That means that I need to finalise the types of questions that I must ask before I talk to the respondents. I usea semi-structured interview schedule because I also need to discuss with them the meanings they attach to their actions as well as their theoretical understanding of DAP and the COs.

3.7.1.1 Open Ended Questions

Semi-structured interviews are characterised by open ended questions, with the aim of providing freedom and flexibility, as Cohen *et al.*(2000, p.273) put it. Explaining its flexibility, Kerlinger (cited in Cohen *et al.,* 2000) noted that although the research purposes govern the questions asked, the content of the questions, the order in which they are asked and the particular wording are entirely in the hands of the interviewer. That means the interviewer has a freedom to probe the respondent to elaborate on the original response in case the respondent has difficulty in answering a question.

For this study, semi-structured interviews, therefore, were deemed more relevant than the structured interview where the interviewer is left with little freedom to make modifications (Kerlinger cited in Cohen *et al.,* 2000, p. 273).

However, it must also be noted that the disadvantage of semi-structured interviews is around what is asked on paper and what is done in practice, that is, during the interview (Hitchcock and Hughes, 1995, p.158). That means the interview has to be dealt with as

it happens. The questions then become strong guidelines for the interview.

I have attached the semi-structured interview schedule as Appendices H1, H2, I and J. I give further information on constructing open-ended questions in 3.9.

3.7.1.2 Avoiding Bias

The main source of bias and influence upon interviews lies in the characteristics of the interviewer (Hitchcock and Hughes, 1995, p.165). This refers to age, gender, class and ethnicity. Teacher's attitudes towards each other are often based upon age of the respective parties concerned (ibid:165). Personally I do not expect difficulties with regard to these characteristics, except possibly from the point of view of gender and status.

I am a Senior Primary teacher with an Honours degree, and the GR practitioners are not yet considered to be professional teachers.Traditionally ECD services have been carried out by women (Chisholm 2004, p. 18). I expect possible discomfort in the learning sites arising from the idea of a man being interested in young children's learning and teaching. In addition, as I am a Xhosa man, there may be further cultural assumptions about my role. In the Xhosa culture, especially in the old days, men were seen as providers for family not associated with the actual activity of raising young children. Though culture is dynamic there are still those who do not associate the role of men as having any role with or responsibility towards young children.

3.7.1.3 Conducting the Interviews

I planned to carry out the interviews in the three GR sites as follows.

a. with the practitioner after each observation to reflect upon the observation report
b. with the Head of Department (HOD) and laterwith the principal
c. with selected parents during the afternoons.

This will happen in each school. I will meet two respondents in each week. Each interview is expected to take 30 to 40 minutes depending on responses from the respondents. I would like to conduct more interviews but due to the challenges of the school day and not being able to leave my own classes I have restricted my interviews to this limited number and time.

Each interview is conducted in isiXhosa. This means that the semi-structured interview questions (in English for this study) will be used as a guide only.

3.7.2 Observation

In addition to the interviews, I will conduct observations of the GR practitioners working with the children and the children doing activities in the classes.

Observation refers to looking at and critically noting in a structured manner the details of a site, event, artefact, or cultural behaviour. Patton (cited in Cohen *et al.,* 2000, p.305) and Birmingham and Wilkinson (2003, p.117) said that during observation the researcher can see (look at) what is taking place first hand as well as hear (listen to),rather than from someone else in a form of interview (no matter how probing the question may be and therefore how extensive the responses are). Specifically I will look at what children and practitioners are actually doing in the process of learning and teaching. As the researcher I shall made notes on what I choose to see (see notes on bias in 3.7.1.2) focusing on the spoken word, expression and activities that the GR practitioners and the children involve themselves in. Thiswill givegave me a better picture of what is happening inthe GR classroom.

Observations include gathering information on numbers, age and on content and methodology being used. This is important as the number of children per class, and space and resources available will impact upon the ability of the practitioner to prepare and to maintain a quality standard of work (South Africa DoE, 2008a, p.27).

Anderson (2002, p.7), however, reminded me that the purpose of observing is to seek understanding of the phenomenon and therefore '*the research relies on systematic and objective observation, recording and analysis'*. That means the researcher should not let her personal experiences, feelings, likes and dislikes influence the interpretation of the study (see section on bias in 3.7.1.2).

The observations will be based on the activities which the GR practitioner is expected to provide (Appendix G) and the observation schedule is attached as Appendix K. The observation schedules refer specifically to the research questions dealing with the ways in which GR practitioners teach for the CO's.

3.7.2.1 Participant and Non-Participant Observation

I used both non-participant and participant observation methods. Participant observation refers to this opportunity not only to note the behaviours of the practitioners and of the children from an observational distance but also to work with the children and to participate in their activities where I need to do so. Participant observation was used as I was '*part of the social life of the participant'* for that time and engaged myself in some activities when the children demanded this (Cohen *et al.,* 2000, p.310).

However, the difference with the non-participant observation is that the researcher stands separate from the group activities being investigated and avoids interacting with the group members (Cohen *et al*.,2000, p.187). At times non-participant observation will be used, for example, when attending parents' meetings. And as I visit the classes, I record additional information beyond that called for in my observation instrument. This information formed part of my notes.

I make notes immediately on the same day. In this way I record what I see and hear in order to interpret and to make meaning of the data I receive through my senses before it fades from memory. All of my notes are available in the file of data that I made.

3.7.2.2 Observation Schedules

Delamont (2002, cited in Hannan 2006) proposed that when preparing for observations, we need to be clear about what to look at, how to observe it, where and when to look for it and what to record.

I prepared for this by developing observation checklists as a guide for what I need to look at and listen to in the classes. I base these on the research questions that I will ask the GR practitioners and others, so that I can triangulate (see 3.7.4.1) the information that I gather. The observation check lists are attached as Appendix K.

3.7.2.3 Avoiding the Limitations of Observations

Observations can also be limiting. The researcher might have the tendency of only recording frequently occurring behaviours and miss the more 'minor' but still useful incidents. Birmingham and Wilkinson, 2003, p.122 suggested that to avoid this, we take advantage of *activity-actor-location*. I understand this to mean:

- Activity: observing the processes of learning and teaching in the GR

- Actor: observing the children as they take part (or not) in activities and the GR practitioners as they teach and facilitate the children's play and learning
- Location: in the three GR classes identified for this study – both inside the buildings and outside in the playgrounds (the context and environment of the learning and teaching).

Faber and van Staden, 1997, p.185 also suggested that the validity of observation can be increased by:

- not overemphasising a single observation
- checking to see whether the results of observations obtained in different ways are the same. That means observing inside and outside the classrooms.

It has been argued that there is also a concern amongst teachers that emotional and social factors are difficult to assess and measure, and even that it is inappropriate at this early stage of a child's development to try to do so (Edmunds and Stewart-Brown, 2003). Further it has been argued that none of the instruments used to measure social and emotional competence is really suitable for use in school settings because of the length of time and training needed for completion (ibid). I tryto be sensitive to these issues in gathering and analysing data. I intend to do this by making detailed notes on what I see and hear, and look for the major and minor themes which emerge from the observations.

3.7.2.4 Conducting the Observations

I planto conduct two observations in each of the three classes. Each observation took place during the school morning as the classes are held for four hours between 08h00 and 12h00 (see 3.6.4).

3.7.3 Field Notes

Field notes are a very important source of information (Anderson, 2002, p.128). The term 'field' refers to where the phenomenon exists (ibid, p.125). According to Hitchcock and Hughes (1995, p.123) 'field' refers to those situations directly connected with learning and teaching in a particular school. It involves a range of activities and individuals.

Observations are recorded in field notes (Cohen *et al.,* 2000, p.311) and should contain a written comment on everything the researcher finds worthwhile (Anderson, 2002, p.128). These could be conversations, description of physical settings and description of the researcher's thoughts and behaviour. Hitchcock and Hughes (1995, p.132) said that these temporary notes can act as 'memory jerkers' for the creation of longer, more permanent notes.

3.7.3.1 Writing the Field Notes

While conducting observations and interviews, I record all relevant information for the study. I also note more informally, these issues on which I have focused above in 3.7.3.

I then tackle the notes I have made so that I make meaning of them in terms of my research purpose, objectives and questions. I did this by analysing the notes and triangulating the information in terms of the purpose of the study.

3.7.4 Document Analysis

Once a written source has been created, for whatever reason, it becomes a 'potential' historical fact and therefore documentary data (Hitchcock and Hughes, 1995, p.218). Documentation refers generally to articles, letters, memoranda, agendas, previous studies and newspaper articles as well as performance records. This kind of record is often called a *'chain-of-evidence'* (Anderson, 2002, p.156). It is a written record from which meanings are interpreted. Researchers usually record and interpret at the same time and this means, according to Hexter (cited in Hitchcock and Hughes, 1995, p.218), that the researcher seeks out and interprets raw data and then creates a second 'interpreted' record, one which is open to public scrutiny.

I attempt to do this with my own records. My analysis and interpretation form chapters 4 and 5.

3.7.4.1 Triangulating the information

Triangulation is a way of making sure that research results are true and valid by using a variety of research methods or approaches (Denzin 1970 quoted in Bryma 2008). By triangulating in this way, we can help to overcome any weaknesses and biases which can occur when we use only one method.

There are four types of triangulation (Denzin 1970 quoted in Bryma 2008) and University of Bolton (2005). I use two in this study.

- data triangulation which involves time, space and persons. In this study for example, research is carried out at different times of the year and the day, across three different classes with a number of different respondents.
- investigator triangulation uses multiple rather than single observers to record the same event. I do not use this method in this study.
- theory triangulation employs a number of different theories to explain the conclusions of the research. I donot use this method in this study.
- methodological triangulation which is a combination of more than one method for gathering information. I use this method in this study.

By using data and method triangulation, I rely upon the interviews, observations, document analysis and field notes. All of these methods focus upon the requirements of the purpose and objectives of this study.

3.7.4.2 Analysing the data

I analyse the information I collect by first of all looking for themes in the data according to the objectives of the study. I then draw out the quotations from the data collection and the observation points I have made. I triangulate these with the literature I have reviewed in Chapter 2.

3.8 Purposively Choosing the Sites and the Respondents

Because of the nature of this study, sampling is made to suit the qualitative case study approach: a small selection of related cases in one area defined as NU8 in Mdantsane. Each of the four schools is in walking distance of the other. In this sample *'every participant is the bearer of the particular characteristic required'* (Cohen *et al.,* 2000, p.288), that is, they are either the children in GR classes, or the parents or teachers of those children.

The selection is also an example of a non-probability sample. This means that it is not necessarily representative of other cases (Cohen *et al.,* 2000, p.102). It does not involve

random selection (Trochim 2006). In this study I have chosen schools which are close to the school in which I teach and as feeder schools to my school.

I used both purposive and convenience sampling (Cohen *et al., 2000, p.*103). In purposive sampling, the sample has been chosen for a specific purpose. That purpose was to understand how effective learning opportunities are provided for children in GR classes in Mdantsane.

I have chosen one GR class in each of three different schools in the area in which I teach. All these GR classes are attached to primary schools as part of the Foundation Phase. The three GR practitioners responsible for these three classes are therefore the three main respondents together with the parents. The parents were selected by asking for volunteers to come and discuss their children's education.

Purposive as my sample is, it is also an example of convenience sampling which refers to selection of the nearest individuals to serve as respondents. The three GR classes were selected from the primary schools which surround the school where I teach.

Cohen *et al.*(2000, p.93) argued that in qualitative studies, too large a sample might be unwieldy for in-depth fieldwork, while too small a sample might be unrepresentative. For the purpose of representivity I interview three practitioners (one from each school) and voluntary groups of parents invited to participate through preliminary parents' meetings held to discuss the research study.

While this sample is reasonably reflective of GR classes in NU8 it is not held to represent a wider population, that is, it simply represents itself (Cohen *et al*., 2000, p.104).

Finally, each of the data collection instruments speaks to all of the research questions in this study.

3.9 Cultural considerations

This study is set in Mdantsane. All of the respondents are Xhosa speaking and live within a majority Xhosa cultural environment. I, the researcher, am a Xhosa man (see also 3.7.1.2).

There is, therefore, the possibility that there will be a 'clash of culture' between the concepts of DAP and COs and ways in which respondents perceive the roles of childhood, teaching, and the values of critical thinking which are adopted in the NCS (see 2.5).

But to talk of an overarching African perspective or African worldview that can be distinguished from a Western perspective is possible (Gyeke, 1987; Okwu, 1978; Sow, 1980 cited in van Dyk 2001). It is however, impossible, to state that a human being is purely the product of one worldview, especially in South Africa with its history of colonialism.

In this study, I first of all focused upon the literature which has, so far, influenced our GR policy and curriculum. This seems to be western-scientific in nature (see Woodhead in Section 2.2.1) but I focusupon these issues by asking respondents to first define their own understandings of key terms (see Appendices H1 and H2). I relate these responses to the 'official' definitions of terms in the literature. I noted in Chapter 2 that there is a strong need to reflect upon the NCS in terms of an Africanist approach, and I address this in my recommendations for further study in 5.7.
In dealing with the issue of culture in this study, I use a participatory approach in the interviews (Pant no date, Chambers 1994, Jennings 2000) for asking questions, encouraging discussion and debate, listening and asking follow-up questions. In this way I hope to create a discussion with the respondents in which they feel enabled to speak freely about the issues that the questions raise.

3.10 Ethical Considerations

There are several ethical pitfalls that I, as a participant researcher, can fall into. In this section I discuss two of them: power and justice.

Orb, Eisenhauer and Wynaden (2000) noted that qualitative researchers focus their research on exploring, examining, and describing people and their natural environments. This means that there are relationships and power between researchers and their respondents.

This is the case even though participation in a research study depends upon the respondent's willingness to share her experience. But even then, the researcher still holds the power in interpreting the data she has collected. The researcher has power over what she chooses as important data, how she analyses the data and how she reports the data. This is so for this study.

In addition, Orb *et al.*(2000) noted that the respondents may not give all the information that they have to the researcher either because they feel powerless or less worthy and therefore withhold information. The respondents may also feel coerced to take part. This is remedied by building trust with them.

The issue of justice is also an important one. Again, Orb *et al.(*2000) explained that because we, the researchers, are in such a position of power, we have to avoid exploiting and abusing the respondents. We can do this by asking for special permission of a respondent if we want to use a specific idea that she has given. We need to make sure that no respondent is at risk because of what we have written in our reports. An example of this need for justice in this study is that the respondents, especially the GR practitioners, may be at risk of negative reports from me. I deal with this by continually asking permission to write about it and in a confidential way.

It is also important to know why respondents participate. De Vos, Delport, Foucher and Srrydom (2004, p.65) were of the opinion that some respondents may participate out of fear of victimisation or in the hope of payment for participation. Such reasons are of paramount importance, as they help us to interpret the reliability of some responses.

To deal with the issues of power and justice, I use the principles of informed consent and confidentiality. I discuss each of these in the following sections.

3.10.1 Informed Consent

Informed consent as defined by Diener and Crandal (cited in Cohen *et al.,* 2000, p.51) refers to *'procedures in which individuals choose whether to participate in an investigation after being informed of facts that would be likely to influence their decisions'.* This concept consists of four elements: competence, voluntarism, full information and comprehension. In addition, consent has been referred to as a

negotiation of trust, and it requires continuous renegotiation throughout the time that the study takes place that is, in the beginning, at each meeting, and at the end of the process for writing the study. At each stage the respondents may voluntarily accept or refuse to participate in the study (Orb *et al.,* 2000).

I drew up a form covering these four elements, and obtained consent from the parents, GR Practitioners, the Principals and School Governing Bodies (SGB) of the four sites. This included consent to record the interviews, to observe their teaching and photographs to be taken in their sites (Cohen *et al.,* 2000, pp. 50-52). The principals, as the School Managers, gave permission in the first place for the study and they notified the District Department of Education regarding the study.

Parents are asked to give their informed consent on behalf of their children and '*Objections, for whatever reason, will be duly respected'* (Cohen *et al.*, 2000, p.52). 'Consent' from the children themselves will be obtained through an introduction of myself, my role and my purposes and through discussion with the children as they require it.

Fine and Sandstrom (cited in Cohen *et al.*2000, p.53) said

> *Our feeling is that children should be told as much as possible, even if some of them cannot understand the full explanation. Their age should not diminish their right, although their level of understanding must be taken into account in the explanations that are shared to them.*

In addition, the participants have been informed at the outset of the study that they can withdraw from the study at any time and also ask any questions regarding the study at any time. 'Informed consent implies informed refusal' (Cohen *et al*., 2000, p.51).

3.10.2 Confidentiality

Anderson, 2002, p.20 contended:

> *Confidential information implies that the identity of the individual will remain anonymous. Information may be quoted and reported, but the identity should be protected.*

As my study is a case study using three GR classes, these schools, together with their GR practitioners, will not be revealed in the study. The principals have already given me names of the GR practitioners and with the help of practitioners, I know names of parents who will participate in the study although the names are not used in this study.

According to Cohen *et al*., 2000, p.61 the essence of anonymity is that information provided by the participants should in no way reveal their identity.

I used the following codes to protect identities:

- GR Practitioners: (GRP)
- Principals: (Pr)
- Head of Department : (HOD)
- Parents: (P).

3.11 Conclusion

This chapter has dealt with justification of the methodology used which I believe is suitable for the achievement of the research purpose. It then dealt with the aspects of case study and discussion of data collection methods. Consideration has also been given to issues regarding research ethics, research limitations as well as assumptions underpinning the study.

Inchapter 4, I comment upon description, summary of the findings that I made and reflect critically upon the use of the methodology. I then make conclusions and recommendations for further use of it in Chapter 5.

Chapter 4 Presentation of the Data

4.1 Introduction

The challenge in the Reception Year, as I have stated in the previous chapters, is that the quality of the learning opportunities offered in Grade R classes does not enable developmentally appropriate opportunities for developing the use of the Critical Outcomes, in the National Curriculum Statement.

As indicated in the previous chapter, the purpose of this research is to explore the extent to which young children are exposed to developmentally appropriate opportunities for learning in order to achieve the COs as outlined in the South African National School Curriculum and the CAPS. This chapter presents the findings of the multiple-site case study conducted in relation to the study.

In Chapter 2, I defined Developmentally Appropriate Practices (DAP) in terms of the National Curriculum Statement for GR which states the competences that young children should have at the end of this year. I also explained the nature of DAP in helping children achieve the COs.

In carrying out this research I was required to focus on the objectives of this study which are to gain insight into:

1. ways in which parents perceive children's developmental needs and their own roles in providing developmentally appropriate activities
2. ways in which GR practitioners implement, through their teaching methodology (using the COs), the GR curriculum in a developmentally appropriate way
3. the competences that young children in the Reception Year programme achieve with regard to the NCS
4. ways in which the GR services are supported within the schools.

In order to carry out this investigation five questions were used:

1. What do parents perceive to be
    a. their own children's developmental needs, their understanding of Developmentally Appropriate Practice and
    b. their and the GR practitioner' roles in supporting their children's development?

2. How do GR practitioners perceive children's developmental needs and their own roles in implementing DAP?
3. How do GR practitioners implement the GR curriculum within the context of DAP and the COs?
4. What do children do and learn while they attend GR classes?
5. What support do the GR classes receive within the school in implementing DAP and the COs?

This chapter describes, first of all, the profiles of the research respondents: parents, GR practitioners and school leadership. It then proceeds to discussion of the observed appropriateness of the school environment for children in GR, which is a most important aspect to be considered for effective teaching and learning to take place. In this chapter I also present findings about the parents' and GR practitioners' understanding of developmentally appropriate learning opportunities as well as the actual activities that children do while learning in the GR classes. The roles of parents and GR practitioners as they perceived them are also explained. The findings in this chapter were gathered through both observations and interviews with the parents, GR practitioners, principals and HODs from the three GR classes.

4.2 Profiles of the respondents

For this small-scale and focused study, I chose the three schools because they were in close proximity to the school in which I teach. The GR practitioners, therefore, were designated as a result of this first choice. The parents were selected with the help of the GR practitioners. They selected parents who were readily available and who resided near the schools.

4.2.1 Profiles of parents interviewed

Name	Highest level of education	Gender	Age	Marital Status	Job description
1. Ms Ne	(STD) Secondary Teachers' Diploma	Female	43years	Single	GR practitioner
2. Ms No	Std 8	Female	62 years	Married	Unemployed
3. Ms Tu	Std 10	Female	35 years	Single	Unemployed
4. Ms Ty	(SPTD) Senior Primary Teachers' Diploma	Female	43 years	Single	GR practitioner
5. Ms M	Std 10	Female	45 years	Married	Sales lady
6. Ms K	Std 10	Female	40 years	Single	Unemployed
Summary	**1 x Std 8 3 x Std 10 2 x post matric qualification**	**All female**	**Average age of 44.6**	**4x single 2 x married**	**3 x unemployed 3 x employed**

Figure 5: Parents taking part in this study

Of these six parents, five were biological parents and one was a grandparent.

The educational background of the parents varied, but was similar to that of the GR practitioners in the schools (see 4.2.2). From conversations with them they mentioned different reasons for being unable to go to school to further their education. Two of the reasons were economic circumstances and related to the responsibilities of heading the family.

All the respondent homes were headed by women. The two married women lived with their own mothers as their husbands were working outside the city. This meant that two children had close relationships with grandparents while others were staying independently in their own houses as they were employed. All of them lived in the standard four-roomed houses commonly found in Mdantsane.

Half of the parents interviewed were employed, with two as GR practitioners at different schools around Mdantsane, but not the schools involved in this study and not even in NU8. This means that they could afford to cater for their own children's needs while the opposite applied to the rest. This could affect their children's performance at school.

All of the respondent parents made themselves available and their skills whenever required by the school, for example in attending parent teacher meetings, and cooking for children when needed. Those parents who were working made arrangements to make themselves available when they could.

Further information on what parents said about their children's learning is stated in section 4.6.

4.2.2 Profiles of GR practitioners interviewed

I worked with three GR practitioners in three Reception Year classrooms attached to the schools. The general information about them is as follows:

GR practitioner	Gender	Age	Home Language	Professional Qualification	Teaching Experience	Current studies
GR practitioner 1	Female	42	Xhosa	Level 04 :GR	10 years	None
GR practitioner 2	Female	53	Xhosa	Level 04:GR	17 years	None
GR practitioner 3	Female	39	Xhosa	SPTD[4]	7 years	B.Ed.

Figure 6: Profiles of GR practitioners

Note that the levels of qualification were low. GR practitioners (GRP1) and (GRP2) each had a matriculation certificate which they received more than 15 years ago. They each had an ECD qualification. Both GRP1 and GRP2 have been trained by non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to obtain the accredited Level 04 ECD qualification. Asked about their intentions in furthering their studies, both showed interest. GRP2 had enrolled for the National Professional Diploma in Education (NPDE[5]) with the local university but had dropped out in the second year. She said she could not cope with the studies due to family responsibilities. She intended to complete her studies the following year. GRP1 on the other hand, as much as she has an interest in studying, did not know where to register. She had asked the DoBE what to do to obtain the Level 5 GR qualification but could not get clear direction.

GRP3 had a Senior Primary Teachers' Diploma (SPTD). She had not been trained to work with GR children. The Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) degree she had registered for would qualify her to teach both GR and the Foundation Phase as a whole. Asked about her intentions in studying for this degree she said she wished to upgrade her qualifications. She had no intention of teaching higher grades. She said she was happy with GR as she earned as much as other GR practitioners although not as much as she would if she were teaching in the higher grades with an SPTD.

[4]Senior Primary Teacher's Diploma (a three year post-matric qualification).
[5] A qualification designed to assist those teachers in the public schooling sector to upgrade their lack of, or low-level qualification to a three-year post matric qualification South Africa Department of Education 2006).

All three GR practitioners were willing to further their studies. They all faced challenges including having no clear information about their own career paths and being older women with many family responsibilities which did not allow full concentration on their studies.

Both GRP 1 and GRP 2 said that, other than working in shops after matric they had started by working with under-fives in the 'crèches[6]' which were not attached to primary schools. GRP 3 said she worked as a shop assistant as well after matric. She has not worked with children before getting involved with the Reception Year as she had never been able to secure a post as a teacher in the Intermediate Phase. She said at that time very few posts were offered by the DoE.

All GR practitioners had a common reason for teaching GR. GRP 1 and GRP 2 said the crèches they were working on were already operating within the school yard and when an opportunity for training came it was a relief to them as their jobs were to be secured.

All of the GR practitioners were the breadwinners in their homes. Because of the high rate of unemployment GRP 3 said she had no choice but to take the available job.

The GR practitioners all seemed to have a passion for their work. Two of them participated fully with the children, sitting on the floor with them, and participating in the physical activities with the children.

4.2.3 Profiles of Principals and Heads of Department

I interviewed six teachers involved in the management of the schools. All were responsible for ensuring the quality of the work done at classroom level.

GR practitioner	Sex	Age	Home Language	Professional Qualification	Position	Current studies
Principal 1	Female	56	Xhosa	PTC[7]	Principal	None
Principal 2	Female	54	Xhosa	PTC	Principal	CPM[8]
Principal 3	Female	58	Xhosa	PTC	Principal	None
HOD 1	Female	55	Xhosa	PTC	HOD	None
HOD 2	Female	60	Xhosa	PTC	HOD	None
HOD 3	Female	52	Xhosa	NPDE	HOD	None

Figure 7: Profiles of Principals and Heads of Department

[6] The term 'crèche' is used to describe an ECD programme for children from birth to four years of age.
[7] Primary Teacher's Certificate (PTC)
[8] Certificate in Project Management

The three principals and three Heads of Department, all women, were within an age group which had much experience in education. Their educational qualifications, however, were particularly low. The Primary Teacher's Certificate was equivalent to a ten year school education with a further two years of teacher education, which did not equate to a school leaving certificate in the years in which they qualified under apartheid education systems (Crankshaw 1997, p.24). The reasons all gave for their low levels of qualification were that they were not interested in furthering studies because they were old and about to retire. They felt that they would not cope with studies as it demands a lot of time, which they were not prepared to give.

They noted that the DoBE offered many workshops which kept them informed of current education issues and therefore there was no need to be anxious about their competence, especially if conditions were not favourable for studying.

Only principal 2 was currently studying. She said as she was about to retire she wanted to be involved in some project which would help her to supplement her income. She, therefore, had enrolled for the CPM for her own benefit with no more interest in educating children.

The leadership of the schools was not worried about qualifications. They did not see them playing any different role or bringing any change to their schools through studying.

To summarise, GR practitioners, HOD's and principals did not have the minimum requirements in their qualifications to teach. They had not yet upgraded their qualifications. The GR practitioners had a Level 04 Further Education and Training Certificate in ECD as the minimum requirement to practice as a GR practitioner. For them to upgrade they would have to obtain a Level 05 National Diploma in ECD and then a B. Ed. Degree which would qualify them to teach from GR through to Grade 3 in the FP.

In the following section I report on the environment in which each GR practitioner works at the schools and the responses of the children, GR practitioners and parents to the environment and its importance in children's own learning.

4.3 The developmentally appropriate context of learning in GR classes

In this section I first describe what the school context for learning means. Then I present findings on each factor of the school context. The data presented in this section is set into the three principles of DAP (as I explained in 2.6).

School context is viewed as how developmentally appropriate to individual children's learning needs it is. School context refers to everything that is meant to help children develop appropriately. These factors include school nutrition, safety and security, attendance, space available and learning materials (see 2.5.1).

4.3.1 School nutrition

Each of the schools in this study benefitted from the school feeding scheme (NSNP) throughout the school including GR children. Local parents helped to make meals. They were paid by the DoBE to do this. Each school received funds from the DoBE, according to the number of children enrolled in that school, to provide a meal a day for every child in the school.

The majority of children benefitting from the programme were from poor backgrounds (see 2.5.6.2).

While I was observing in the schools I saw all the children running to the place where they were going to be supplied with the meal. The GR practitioners noted that this was everyday behaviour when the bell rang.

There were a few children, however, who did not bother to queue for the meal. They had brought their lunch boxes, containing bread, juice and fruit with some snacks in a form of chips. This suggests that not everything children eat is healthy. I observed that the food was generally healthy.

I observed that almost all parents provided their children with a lunch box. I asked one of the parents why children bring a lunch box to school while the school is offering a nutrition programme. She said the lunch box helped children sometimes after school. She said children ate the meal provided by school at 10 am and then ate their lunch box food while they waited to be fetched home after 12.00.

Food seemed to be a strong motivation for attending school (4.3.5).The issue of the lunch box was important to parents. Some parents said that they needed to keep their children at home if they did not have a lunch box. I asked those children not going to queue for meals to explain the reasons for that action. One responded that the meal was provided for those who came from poor families. According to several children, if you queue for that meal it meant you are admitting that you come from a poor family.

In my personal experience, also in my own school, I have heard children expressing their dissatisfaction about the school nutrition programme. They said sometimes the rice or mealie pap was not cooked well. To some parents and children in my own school, if you queue for a meal at school it meant you could not afford to provide a meal for your child.

Some parents whom I interviewed viewed the unavailability of food as demotivating for the children's attendance. They said that parents sent their children to school hoping that they will get a meal for the day.

The GR practitioners' response was that parents were not informed of the daily meals menu. This was the responsibility of the principal or someone elected to coordinate the programme in the school and it had not been carried out (including by the GR practitioner through information via the children to their parents).

During my observations on different days, children were usually given soup and a slice of bread, rice, mealies and pap. Two examples of the official menus were given as follows:

Day	Food Item	Per child
Monday and Thursday	Fortified Maize Meal (pap)	60g
	Soya mince, with onions and tomatoes	30g
	Oil	2ml
	Salt	1.6g
	Cabbage OR spinach	130g
Tuesday	Rice	60g
	Soya mince, with onions and tomatoes	30g
	Oil	2ml
	Salt	1.6g
	Cabbage OR spinach	130g
Wednesday and Friday	Samp	60g
	Soya mince, with onions and tomatoes	30g

Day	Food Item	Per child
	Oil	2ml
	Salt	1.6g
	Cabbage OR spinach	130g

Menu 2

Days	Food Item	Raw Quantity
Monday to Friday	Fortified brown bread	100g (2 slices)
	Margarine	10g
	Fruit in season	1 medium size

Figure 8: Two examples of school menus

No fortified juice was supplied to schools and children were encouraged to drink clean water. The school menus were similar to the menus that the children received at home.

Besides provision of meals to children a second purpose of the NSNP was to establish food production initiatives as well as educating learners and the community at large about good nutrition (2.7.1).

All of the schools had yards big enough to make gardens available to the schools and two of the sites had school gardens. These gardens were run by the community as garden projects from cultivation to irrigation. Water came from school taps. No school children however, took part in this project in either school. The products from the garden benefitted those community members taking part with part of the produce being given to the school to be used to make soup. There were not enough vegetables to serve this purpose well or even frequently, and therefore the schools could not depend on school garden vegetables. They depended on food from suppliers through NSNP.

Principals all noted that the benefit of the community school gardens was that the school yard was kept clean. They noted that gardening was not a school project.

All the GR practitioners complained that the nutrition programme was not reliable as sometimes food was not supplied by the DoBE. One of the school principals said the suppliers would say they were not paid by the DoBE and therefore they did not have money to buy food for schools.

The schools all used one of the classrooms for preparing meals. As numbers of children in schools have dropped, the principals, said, there were spare classrooms. Food was

stored at the back of principal's office. There were no refrigerators to store perishable food.

In summary, although all three schools offered children food for them to be able to concentrate in their learning, there were challenges around the school nutrition programme. These challenges are discussed in 5.2.2.

4.3.2 Safety and security

Equally as important as nutrition is the safety of children at home and while at school. Safety can be defined by stability, order and protection that surrounds children. In this section I describe not only the physical safety and security of the children within the school, but also the emotional safety and security that I observed between children and their GR practitioners (see 2.7).

When children get to school they still have their basic physical requirements which we all need to survive. These include food, water, rest, fresh air, exercise and good health. GR practitioners, therefore, have to make sure that these needs are met.

4.3.2.1 Safe schools

All the schools I visited were secured as they were fenced with school gates which were locked during school hours. The access to the schools was through the gate only. Schools 1 and 3 had caretakers to open gates for visitors during school hours. The classroom doors inside were lockable as well.

In terms of intervals, the schools applied one principle for all children in the school. They had two breaks. Because GR in all the schools was part of the school they were bound by the same rule.

In none of the schools, however, was there supervision of children by GR practitioners or teachers during break time. Children were playing outside while GR practitioners were in their classrooms having tea or lunch. In one school the GR practitioner was sitting in the classroom but not far from the door. She said she did not supervise them but was available in case of emergency. This is against the Law of Delict as explained in 2.7.2.

According to one GR practitioner, letting children play without interference makes children feel more at ease than when the GR practitioner was amongst them.

4.3.2.2 Safety of the classrooms

There were no structurally dangerous items within the school buildings. As opposed to schools 2 and 3, the cottage (a four roomed house used for GR) in school1 had no ceiling, meaning that the house was very hot in summer and very cold in winter. The windows were not broken, however, so air circulation could be controlled. In all schools there were no roof leaks and it was therefore comfortable inside when it rained. The floors were made of wood allowing children to be able to use them for learning freely without fear of cold. The wooden floor made it easy to clean.

Figure 9: Classroom with no ceiling

Safety of children both physically and emotionally was taken into consideration therefore. Only the issue of the law of delict seemed to cause a challenge.

4.3.2.3 Safe and secure relationships

Children also require emotional safety. It was interesting to see how children and the GR practitioners had a mutually friendly and secure relationship. Children were talking to their GR practitioners demonstrating that they were feeling happy and relaxed in the presence of the GR practitioner. GR practitioners in turn showed children that they loved them. They smiled at children and comforted them when children reported their dissatisfactions and problems.

In all the schools the GR practitioners used loudly raised, high voices which I observed seemed to frighten the children. While children were busy with activities given by the GR practitioner, one or two children would do something different which was not perceived to be 'right' by the GR Practitioner. The GR practitioners raised their voices to stop what the children were doing.

4.3.3 Space available

Space is one important factor that can limit or help in provision of developmentally appropriate learning opportunities (2.7.3).

School 1 housed 23 GR children within the school premises in what used to be a school cottage, a four roomed house, of 24 square meters, as opposed to 64 square metres per standard school classroom. This meant that each child had about 1 sq.m. to stand or sit in when the whole class is present.

Figure 10: A cottage used for 23 GR children and crowded together to learn

There was not enough space in any of the rooms to make different learning 'areas' such as reading, creative activities, blocks, puzzles, make believe and discovery areas. As a result of the lack of space children were unable to move around freely.

The GR practitioner was unable to give children a variety of activities at the same time. She gave the whole class an instruction to do one activity together at the same time. Even then there was not enough space to do such activities freely.

Figure 11: A standard classroom overcrowded with 30 children at tables

The second and third school used one of its classrooms to accommodate 30 and 23 GR children each. Both were the standard size of 64 square meters for classrooms in Mdantsane schools. The available space, however, was not utilized effectively as there was a lot of space but no different learning corners because of the large numbers of desks and chairs taking up room. For example, the very few books I observed were not in an accessible book area or games in an accessible educational games area but packed into available spaces far from the use of the children. Children therefore sat at tables not able to move freely to gather materials to play and to learn.

The GR practitioners also therefore were forced to be very teacher-directed as a result. In addition, as a result of the two intervals which all children in the school had for (unsupervised) free outdoor play, all prepared learning activities occurred in these very small spaces. This again forced GR practitioners to conduct only teacher-directed learning.

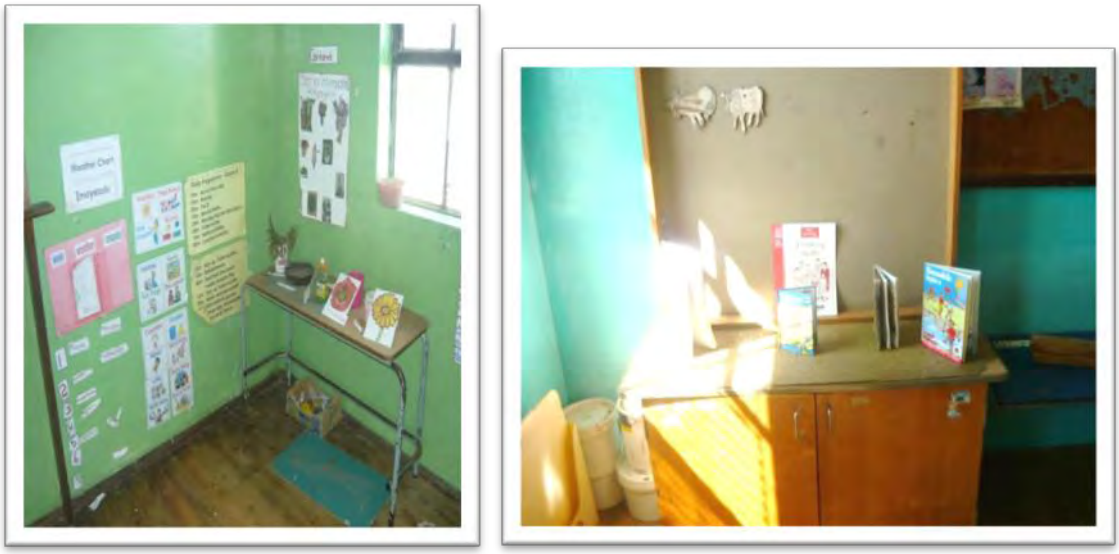

Figure 12: Book areas in two schools. This was a useful idea but children were unable to access the very few resources because of space constraints.

4.3.4 Learning and Teaching Support Materials (LTSM)

In this section I discuss my findings about LTSM in each of the schools. Learning materials in this study refers to all that children use within and outside the classroom for the purpose of learning (see 2.7.4).

4.3.4.1 Indoor LTSM

All of the sites I visited have suitable and enough furniture for young children and the GR practitioners. These were desks and chairs. The GR practitioners said they had been supplied by the District Office of the DoBE. In all the schools the furniture was in good condition. There was however, too much of it for the available space (see above).

School 2 had never received any furniture since the school opened in the late 1970s. All maintenance had been carried out by community members in 2001. The furniture, tables and chairs, were suitable for children as well.

Not in any school did I find enough resources for learning and teaching. Among resources I have seen in all the schools were puzzles, scissors, beads, magazines for cutting and pasting, paintbrushes, crayons and charts with numbers and consonants. There were educational games though very few and some blocks but not enough for construction.

Figure 13: LTSM set out for display (but not necessarily for use)

There were very few books in any of the classrooms and those which were there were kept next to the table of the GR practitioner. They were not displayed in an attractive manner for children to enjoy looking at or reading them. The few available, however, were appropriate for GR level as they had pictures outside and inside as well and had been presented to the schools by the DoBE.

I observed few LTSM for example, the mathematical equipment such as counting boards (abacuses), constructive play materials or fantasy play materials, were used in classrooms 1 and 2, either inside or outside. I observed no fantasy play opportunities being given, such as children pretending they are cooking, phoning, and so on.

School 3 had a variety of resources for indoor activities. Children were involved in fantasy play as they were playing with dolls and blocks, role playing and answering the telephone. They were working with crayons, scissors and magazines as well.

Children's work for the current year was displayed at school 1, though not at children's height.

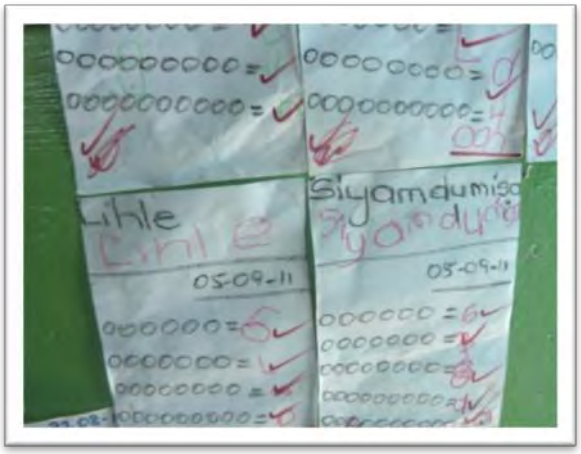

Figure 13 and 14: Children's work displayed on the walls. Note that both examples are teacher-directed.

No children's work was displayed either in school 2 or 3 where there were charts only in the wall.

Figure 15 Teaching charts on the wall

4.3.4.2 Outdoor LTSM

In this section I discuss the outdoor equipment of the schools (see 2.4.7.2). Outdoor equipment refers to anything children use outside their classrooms, but within the school grounds for learning. These include open spaces, tyres, swings, jungle gym, trees, grass, sand and water. In all the three schools the outdoor equipment was either arranged by previous parents, bought from school fees (when fees were paid before GR became a universal programme attached to schools) or through sponsorship by local businesses.

School 1 had very limited outdoor equipment (see Figure 12). It was not in an attractive condition as some tyres seem to have been painted long ago and possibly with leaded paint which is poisonous to human beings. Among the equipment were a jungle gym for children to climb, with a few tyres which were installed into the ground (so that they look like a half tyre). Those tyres served two purposes of marking the ground or surrounding the cottage and for children to play with. Seven tyres and one jungle gym were the only equipment in the outdoor area.

There were no loose tyres that children could roll. As a result when children were playing outside they played running and catching games. I observed them playing unstructured and unsupervised games, including pushing each other to fall in the ground.

School 2 had very limited outdoor equipment as well. Despite lack of outdoor equipment children were playing outside with the available equipment. There was a jungle gym which looked old but still intact, tyres in good condition and a swinging pendulum made of wood and rope. The children used a tree within the school yard to climb. Some children were playing on the jungle gym while some were running and rolling tyres, or themselves, in grass which is not properly maintained. Children were however, joyful in their play although it was not extended through adult intervention or interesting LTSM. The play in which they were involved was therefore not planned to be educational. The children would have played in the same way in the streets and neighbourhoods of home.

School 3 was the least equipped of the three schools I visited. I observed not a single piece of equipment outside except a few tyres that had been installed long ago. Not even a tree had been planted, except the small one in front of the principal's office which

was not suitable for children to play on. Even the grass was not maintained. Again, when children were playing outside they played their normal games they do when playing at home.

Figures 15 and 16 : The very few items of outdoor LTSM in the schools 2 and 3

None of the schools had proper playgrounds meaning there was no proper maintenance of the school property or no value attached to the outdoor area. In addition, all available outdoor LTSM was for the use of all the children in the whole school. This made use by the GR children during the breaks as well as overall maintenance difficult.

4.3.5 Attendance

In this section attendance is looked at from two perspectives: the actual attendance in the classroom as well as age of children attending in the Reception Year (see 2.7.5).

School	Enrolment	Average attendance observed	Underage children enrolled
1	23	10	5
2	30	21	6
3	23	20	4

Figure 17: Enrolment, attendance and age

When asked to give reasons for this poor attendance, none of the GR practitioners gave clear reasons. One attributed it to the 'irresponsibility' of some parents. She gave a testimony of one child who said, when asked why she was absent yesterday, that her mother did not wake her up in the morning. A second said that most children stayed with grandparents who got ill sometimes and therefore were unable to prepare for grandchildren to go to school.

In contrast, one parent said that when the weather was bad it was difficult to let the young children go to school. She claimed that the school was too far for children to walk to during unfavourable weather conditions. Some parents said nutrition was their problem, that it was difficult to send children to school without a lunch box (see 4.3.1).

In addition to the challenge of daily attendance, in all the schools I noticed that there were several under-age children enrolled in the same GR class under one GR practitioner. Questioned about under-fives in the same classroom the GR practitioners' responses were that:

- when the crèche was started years ago it had no age limit. When the DoBE declared GR as part of the Foundation Phase those children aged three and four continued to form part of the school roll.
- under-fives were normally separated from GR and it was only when there was no GR or ECD practitioner available that they were put together. The ECD practitioner was on sick leave when I was in the school.
- although the school's focus now is on GR, not the crèche, parents still send their children as usual. They were told by the GR practitioner that this was permissible because the child would take two years to graduate to grade 1.

Figure 18: A mixed classroom (GR and under-fives enrolled together)

The issue of underage enrolment may be as a result of fewer numbers enrolling in schools in Mdantsane and it seems that there may be a lack of communication between the school and the parents with regard to attendance of children at school.

In this section I have reported on conditions for learning in the respondent schools. It became difficult for children to learn when they were hungry, when feeling insecure, when overcrowded in the classroom, when working in a space not developmentally appropriate and when there was not enough or suitable material to engage with in a freely available way. All of these factors affected their abilities to learn.

Having discussed the school context as one factor that affects learning and teaching in the next section I present findings about the perceptions of parents about the concept of DAP as well as their perceptions of the GR practitioner ’s role.

4.4 Parents’ perceptions of DAP

In 2.6 I explained that DAP can be understood as an integration of child development theory, the needs of each individual child and the context under which the child lives. In this section I present findings of what parents perceive to be DAP. I begin with a description of their thoughts on child development and their own responsibilities in ensuring that their children receive the best care and education possible for the future. I then describe their views on developmentally appropriate context in the home.

4.4.1 Parents’ understanding of child development and of appropriate practice in the home

4.4.1.1 The 'good' child

When parents were asked to share their understanding of what is meant about child development they responded by showing what they expect of a 'good' child. They were of the opinion that there were some characteristics that should be seen, such as a child who

- is a caring individual amongst her peers and other people in general,
- shows respect for her peers and older people
- is loyal and able to socialise with all people in a trustworthy way.

Some parents emphasised that it is pleasing for parents to see their children dedicating their lives to church activities as they claim church helps to mould lives of people.

4.4.1.2 Developmentally appropriate practice towards the 'good' child

Besides their expectations about 'good' children, parents showed an understanding that there is a lot involved in practicing appropriate child development knowledge even before you get to expectations of a 'good' child. They said that as a parent you have to work hard in preparing your child for tomorrow. One parent said:

> *If you want your child to be a good person in life you must invest what you want to reap. Give your child an unconditional love then he will feel loved which will result in him showing love to other people when grown (P1).*

In addition to that the second parent said:

> *Children need to be respected like other people. We as parents we tend to ignore what children raise as their concerns. If a child reports to you that other children don't want to play with her we ignore that and just tell him to leave them or promise the child to buy some sweets for him. We forget that the child's concern was to be amongst other children and we have not solved the problem (P2).*

Parents 4 and 5 were of the opinion that for children to develop well their lives should be balanced. They said children should be exposed in almost all areas of development.

> *Children should not only be developed mentally by knowing names of family members and home address but also emotionally and physically. When they feel like playing they should play for muscle development and they should learn to control themselves not to fight with other children (P4).*
>
> *As much as schooling is important because of curriculum they should master at early age other important areas like being able to work with other children and share with them when need arises (P5).*

4.4.1.3 Providing for the basic needs of the child

All the parents expressed and shared the common concern which was provision of basic needs to their children. Part of the basic needs they talked about were love, food, clothing and general school needs.

> *We pay for school needs when required and make sure that the lunch box and school uniforms are ready at all times. When she makes drawings at home we help her when she makes mistakes (P1).*

In addition to the provision of basic needs P2 and P3 said:

> *I try by all means to provide my child with whatever she needs especially if I afford to buy it, like toys. I do not want her to suffer the way I did while I was young (P2).*
>
> *I make sure that the child has a lunch box, clothes are clean and she has proper medication if there is any need. If there is anything asked from the school I provide that so that my child does not feel embarrassed amongst others (P3).*

She further said

> *...I also buy toys and any learning equipment such as a laptop for her to develop language and love of numbers (P3).*

P5 said she made time when available to talk to her child and open space for both of them to talk about school.

> *When I am at home she would tell me all what she did at school and what she did not like. When she is happy she makes some drawings and explain to me what they are (P5).*

Parents seemed to have a good understanding of what child development is. They knew that child development involves all areas of development. The parent respondents, however, seemed to see their role as only helping children to feel secured and loved by providing children's needs. To parents these needs are love and security, lunch box, clean clothes and medication.

Parents seemed to think that it is the responsibility of the GR practitioners to help their children learn. They do not take responsibility for being the first educators themselves. They see the role of parents and of GR practitioners as quite separate.

4.4.1.4 Recognising milestones in development

In response to the question of their perceptions about developmental milestones, in providing developmental activities for their own children, each parent responded according to what she had noticed while her child was at home with her.

> *He follows instructions which include compulsory rest for an hour after school. The other day the child said to me as we approach traffic lights we must stop because it is red and wait until it is green. I was so impressed to see that they are learning at school (P1).*

The second parent said her child cooperates with other children well.

> *I see she is growing. She likes to draw people or cars and tell who is in the picture or whose car he has drawn. Sometimes I do not see what the child is saying but I have to praise her for she has done something (P2).*

The third and fourth parents, like others, appreciated what GR practitioners were doing for their children.

> *Our children have learnt a lot at school. They even learn to sympathize by contributing with 50c when there is death related matter (P3).*

…they learn to say good bye, thank you, saying name and surname as well as the address. She even tells the story of what happened at school or wherever we may have gone to (P3).

The young boy is learning well as he follows instructions from the parents. These include sweeping the floor at home, going to shop sending messages as instructed. At times he would like to wash the dishes after dinner (P4).

P5 was impressed with the social lessons her child had learn at school. These included the ability to share with others and in social conscience:

My child has learnt to share sweets and clothing with others in the family unlike before. If someone has done anything wrong he would immediately come and report that (P5).

P2 also indicated that her young boy was learning well as he follows instructions from the parents:

Sometimes you worry when the child does not follow instructions. I am happy with my child as he does follow instructions. I am talking about small things like sweeping the floor at home, going to shop sending messages as instructed. At times he would like to wash the dishes after dinner (P2).

P3 said she helped her child in any way she could:

It is so funny to note how children learn. If I ask my child what were you doing today sometimes he knows and sometimes don't remember anything. When asking the same question to the child staying next door she will quickly tell you. I have accepted that children differ. I just help him when I have time (P3).

Generally parents appreciated what GR practitioners were doing with their children. They believed that their children were learning a lot at school as they were impressed by the skills children were demonstrating when at home. GR practitioners were seen by parents to be the ones to help their children achieve necessary skills needed in formal education.

Although parents were enthusiastic about the work that the GR practitioners were doing with their children, they (even the two parents who were ECD practitioners themselves) did not cite many competences dealing with school readiness such as emergent reading and numeracy skills. These examples of learning at school were not of new competences, but of the competence children usually have as part of a family and neighbourhood:

...I was so impressed last week when we were in town. She told me not to cross the street while the cars are running and traffic lights are closed because cars will kill me (P5).

4.4.1.5 'School readiness' competences

Parents did not describe their children's school readiness in terms of what they were learning at school. They did, however, cite a number of things their children were doing at home. These included counting number of buttons, shoes or anything they see in their surroundings, naming colours and shapes as well as healthy habits. The grandmother noted that television was also an important aspect of education:

> *...today's children are cleverer than us in our times. They know a lot we were not aware of. My child will shout when he sees a word on the television that he learnt at school or an advertisement while passing by (P1).*

She further said

> *If the child demonstrates ability in those areas of counting and naming shapes, then that child is progressing (P1).*

P6 saw GR as important class that makes children feel at school. She said:

> *When my child get to grade 1 he will be used to be with a GR practitioner. He must learn to be with someone not from the family (P5).*

Their general view was that as parents themselves, they should display acceptable behaviours so that children are not confused by school. Children would then follow a developmental path appropriate for the family, the neighbourhood and for the child herself.

4.4.2 Parents' perceptions of the developmentally appropriate context of learning

In the interviews, the parents defined the context in terms of their own practice as parents.

Asked to explain the role parents play in providing their children with developmentally appropriate opportunities with respect to promotion of interest in literacy in general parents responded differently in this question.

> *Unfortunately we do not have books here at home. There is no so much reading therefore. I have not noticed any interest in reading from the child. Most of the time the child likes to play with his ball after school and come back to watch television (P1).*

P2 as well said there was not so much reading and writing at home. Asked about the role played at home in developing literacy and numeracy skills for example, the parent said that there was nothing educational that the child did at home.

> *There are no books around at home and I am not interested in reading. The contributing factor is the other child who is older than him who is lazy in doing school work. The young child is not motivated to reading or scribbling because no one uses books here at home (P2).*
>
> *...sometimes he will write something not clear. What he does is to count for me before we go for bed. He is progressing as he count up to 40 though he is twisting other numbers like 19, 29 and 39 (P2).*

When P3 was asked about reading at home the parent said when other children were doing their school work the young ones (GR) joined them with their books and any available paper and did 'homework' as well. The availability of books is a contributing factor in reading development, said the parent.

> *When others are doing school work he would take any paper and write whatever he thinks of. Though it is not clear to me what he writes I have to encourage him as if I understand what he writes though I don't (P3).*

The fourth parent said her child was developing interest in books.

> *The boy is encouraging now as he shows interest in his school. I bought couloring books for him to use while at home and he uses them. When we go for shopping he would go to the area that sells stationery alone and look for other colouring books (P4).*
>
> *...sometimes my child would ask for a book to make drawings and he writes unclear crosses. Because I do not want to discourage him I had to praise him for what he has written even if I do not understand what it is. I simply praise him when he is doing school verses and counting (P4).*

P5 said in response to the question of the role she plays in supporting her child:

> *If I come home while the child is staying I ask her to sing a song for me or tell me what they did at school.*
>
> *I used to instruct him to listen when someone is talking so that he can get the message clearly. I see that he has improved now in listening (P5).*
>
> *When he goes to school, if he forgets to say goodbye, I remind him by saying goodbye or good morning if he did not say so.*

P6 on the other hand was of the view that working parents did not have time to give much support to young children. Despite that, however, she made all efforts in supporting the child.

Like the other parents, P6 was not sure about her own child's progress as books were left at school. She said that she did not notice any skill practiced at home. She saw her role as that of looking after the child's clothes and preparing food:

> *To be honest I am not sure of what is that they are learning in their school. When my child is here at home he does not practice what I used to see other children doing who are from other schools. Other children sing songs or doing verses learnt at school (P6).*

In conclusion, parents defined the 'good child' as one who is socially aware and able to integrate with others. They saw the benefits of a good developmentally appropriate upbringing. They all saw as their primary responsibility the development of their own children within the home. They did not see themselves as the ones responsible for educating their children in areas of literacy and numeracy. Their assumption was that GR practitioners were responsible for that part of academic development. In their discussions, however, of their children's abilities at home, I observed that many of their points and examples matched competences which are laid down in the NCS for GR (see Appendix G). It seems therefore, that parents unconsciously carried out many of the 'school readiness' functions of the NCS at home. They did however, give this responsibility to the GR practitioners rather than take it as their own.

4.5 GR practitioners' perceptions of DAP

In this section I describe the information that I gathered from the GR practitioners. The discussions with the GR practitioners on the COs took precedence with them. This section therefore summarises in broad detail only, their views on DAP.

4.5.1 GR practitioners understanding of children's developmental needs

The idea of the 'good child' was to a large extent, incorporated in the GR practitioners' views of the importance of listening to instructions, obeying them obediently. They said:

> *As a practitioner you feel happy when you see that your children do listen carefully and follow the instructions. Such children are promising to be somewhere in life as listening is one of major skills of importance (GRP 1).*
>
> *A good child is the one who can speaking without fear and listening attentively when needed to. The child must have some interest in a bit of reading and writing (GRP2).*
>
> *He/she should be someone who is responsible when given a duty to do, someone not easily influenced negatively and someone who cares for others (GRP3).*

According to the GR practitioners, child development referred to the provision of opportunities for children to develop holistically. They noted that it involved guiding children about what and what not to do. They all believed that nearly all development is done at home where the children spend a lot of time with parents while GR practitioners have as their role the focus on specific cognitive skills such as reading and writing. The three GR practitioners all believed children differed in many aspects and that idea could contribute to their teaching method.

In developing language skills, for example, GR practitioners said:

> *You can see that some children are gifted as they can tell stories logically, write their names having not spent much time in the Reception Year (GRP 1)*
>
> *Some children read as instructed to do so while others enjoy reading at all times, instructed or not (GRP 1).*
>
> *I was thinking of making a book corner where one would have her own book. I think that will help them have interest in looking at books (GRP 2).*
>
> *They sometimes hold books without being instructed. What I notice is that they just look for pictures. When asking what the picture tells, some will explain what they think of the picture. Others will simply tell you that they do not know. Through a variety of books displayed in front of children, they can gradually develop interest in reading (GRP 3).*

In their discussions, GR practitioners were aware of the theories about DAP. In contrast with the observations that I made (4.3.4) however, it seems that the challenge lies in implementing their knowledge in the classroom.

4.5.2 GR practitioners' perceptions of DAP

In their responses to this question, GR Practitioners said that the level of reading and writing in children differs depending on the type of family the child comes from. She said a reading family will motivate a child to read whereas a non-reading one will not.

> *The type of family the child comes from matters most as some families read meaning the child is also motivated to read or is surrounded by a print rich environment (GRP 1).*
>
> *We always struggle at the beginning of the year as we get children sometimes who are from rural areas. In most cases you will notice that these children are not exposed to reading and you have to build that interest first (GRP 2).*
>
> *I try by all means to make sure that the classroom is attractive to young children so that they can connect what is in their classroom with what they see outside (GRP 3).*

All GR practitioners noted that developmentally appropriate practices by both parents and GR practitioners helped the children learn. Knowing the child's background helped

the GR practitioner with her work and the parents were the first educators of their own children, including with 'school readiness'.

4.6 Summary of findings on DAP

From the discussions with parents and GR practitioners I found that parents as well as GR practitioners had a good understanding of what child development is. They knew that child development involves all areas of development. GR practitioners were aware that children should be developed holistically, although their practice seemed, in my observations, to be in contrast to what they said about holistic child development.

Both the parents and the GR respondents in this study defined the 'good child' as firstly one who is socially competent. The concept of 'school readiness' was seen as important to both, although the parents seemed to be not fully aware of their own role in promoting school readiness and believed that this was the responsibility of the GR practitioner. The GR practitioners felt that 'school readiness' was a joint responsibility. There seemed however, to be little liaison for action between the two groups in practice, although both groups noted its importance.

Parents saw their role as helping children to feel secure and loved by providing for their children's physical, social and emotional needs. To parents these needs were for school attendance, primarily lunch boxes, clean clothes, medication and general school needs. Parents thought that it was the responsibility of the GR practitioners to help their children to learn. They did not take the responsibility of being the primary educators themselves. GR practitioners on the other hand expected parents to play their role in providing children with a home environment which was developmentally appropriate for effective learning to take place in school. I noted however, that parents all talked about the children's abilities to carry out actions related to 'school readiness' at home, though they seemd not to be conscious of their own knowledge.

The extent to which parents provided developmentally appropriate opportunities produced different responses. Parents explained that they were not families who used books and therefore children were not exposed to a culture of reading and writing at home although they were all determined to do whatever they could to promote their children's development. GR practitioners on the other hand, claimed that they tried by all means to create in their classrooms an environment that would help even those from disadvantaged backgrounds who did not have the opportunity of exposure to literacy

and numeracy activities. This was not observed, however, for at least the reasons of lack of space and LTSM for the GR children.

In the next section, I report on the GR practitioners' ability to provide developmentally appropriate opportunities for children to achieve the seven CO's.

4.7 Children's learning in terms of the Critical Outcomes

In this section I have set out the information I have collected in two parts:

- The competences that the children gather which is embedded in the curriculum and is observed in the actions that the children take
- The way in which the GR practitioners facilitate learning, which is embedded in the COs and is observed in the methods or actions that the GR practitioner takes.

4.7.1 GR practitioner's actions in promoting the Critical Outcomes

In this section I look at the way in which the GR practitioners facilitated learning which is embedded in the COs and is observed in the methods or actions that the GR practitioners took and their understanding of their role in promoting each competence (see 2.9).

4.7.1.1 Identify and solve problems and make decisions using critical and creative thinking

My observations

This CO requires GR practitioners to give children activities that will encourage the development of problem solving skills. GR practitioners should provide as many opportunities as possible for children to Identifying problems, working out best ways of solving them.

All of the GR practitioners instructed children to name numbers and count beyond 10. Few activities where children could count, find patterns, measure and solve problems were offered and I observed only formal activities such as '2+1=3'. In one school, Children were not offered any material like bottle tops or beads to help them to count. When children gave wrong answers asked in plenary only, the GR practitioner corrected by asking the rest of the class to give the correct answer.

All of the GR practitioners did give opportunities to choose what they wanted to do, but these were limited by space and lack of LTSM. While playing together, children, for example, were building structures and in that process informally identifying problems that needed solutions but I observed little formal planned activity by the GR practitioners to consciously promote this competence in their daily programmes.

In all the schools, as much as they engaged in problem solving activities, they did not engage in more challenging activities that would challenge their reasoning in solving, for example, mathematical problems or challenges encountered while engaged in the activities in Life Skills.

In the second school children were given active and planned opportunities. Children were not given freedom to choose what to play with. They were told what to do.

In the third school, I observed not a single activity related to problem solving. Even with creative visual and dramatic art activities, very few opportunities were provided. Mostly children were told what to do based on what was taught by the GR practitioner on that day. Their natural creativity was not explored or enabled by the GR practitioner.

Within the classroom in all the schools children were asked in plenary (without group work of problem solving activities) to give answers to closed questions for example, to identify shapes around in their classroom.

In all the schools, therefore, there were limited effective opportunities provided for problem solving. There were no activities relating to real life situations or even use of real objects in solving problems.

GR practitioner views

In discussion about opportunities to provide for problem identification and resolution, GR practitioners said:

> *It is important that you give children opportunities to think and solve problems. The best way in doing that is to ask thought-provoking questions as well as open ended questions (GRP 1).*

While this GR practitioner knew what to do, there was little evidence of this in her practice. The more seemingly realistic view was presented as follows:

If choice is opened to them they will end up fighting as they might choose one activity. We have a limited number of resources, they are not enough for wider choice (GRP2).

Two practitioners gave examples of problem solving activities, the first of which was useful for informal work and the second of which useful if used in smaller groups as well as only in the plenary:

> *To assist them in problem identification sometimes I put blocks in a large basket and instruct them to take it to the next corner. They will find it difficult and think of reducing the load (GRP3).*
>
> *When doing any activity with them if I discover that something is wrong maybe from their answers I involve others in correcting that problem (GRP 2).*

It seems therefore from this study that problem-solving as a way of teaching was not inherent in the Gr R practitioner's methods of teaching.

4.7.1.2 Work effectively with others as members of a team, group, organisation and community

This CO requires GR practitioners to give children activities that will encourage co-operative learning, group work, doing projects, solving problems together, building something together, debating how to do something together, achieving their goal together.

In two schools I observed children co-operating with the GR practitioner when given a task. They followed instructions to use scissors when required to do so. Children were co-operating which the GR practitioner said was due to enough material being available. She instructed children to take turns in taking scissors and magazines to avoid pushing one another. They were doing an activity in pairs.

In the third school, a group of children were fighting to use the scissors and crayons when asked to take them for cutting pictures and write their names. The GR practitioner explained that it was because there were not enough for the number of children. The GR practitioner stopped them and told them that fighting was not the right thing to do. She said they must give turns in using the scissors while other were looking for pictures. When settled they talked to each other while completing the work.

In the third school there was no evidence of group work. It was not clear as some were working individually while others were in pairs or in groups of three. There was no clear

instruction. They were working co-operatively in a way as one child would talk to the other in another group and come back to his/her task.

The seating arrangements in all the schools ensured that the children were in groups. They had good opportunities to talk to the person next to or opposite each other as instructed.
The GR practitioners in the three schools did not consciously organise the children to cooperate other than in these sorts of incidents. The children were mainly organised to do the same activities together at the same time (that is, all were cutting and drawing together) and hence there was a shortage of LTSM).

GR practitioner views

Children tend to work together naturally at this age said the GR practitioners:

> *From the games they play in the classroom and outside to the activities they do while in the classroom they work together. As much as they like to quarrel they work together (GRP 2).*
>
> *I usually witness their sense of belonging to others or being part of the group is seen when they are playing outside where there are long stacks of wood or jungle gym and some are climbing on it (GRP 3).*
>
> *In these days we encourage children to feel being the member of the group. But there are those who always need to be reminded of the group importance (GRP 1).*

4.7.1.3 Organise and manage themselves and their activities responsibly and effectively

This CO requires GR practitioners to provide children with opportunities to manage activities, manage their own behaviour (e.g. through group norms and an understanding of what is acceptable, when and where) as well as to manage the learning environment e.g. taking out activities, putting them back, knowing what to do and how to do it.

In all the schools the daily routines for children to manage themselves were in place. These included activities like going to the toilet in a queue or asking for permission when needing to go to the toilet outside of the toileting routine times, washing of hands and putting away their possessions. Health precautions were demonstrated and knowledge of communicable diseases was demonstrated. Some GR practitioners talked about safety with the children while in the school and when at home.

The three schools were similar in the organisation and management of activities by children. In the first school the GR practitioner gave children instruction to take scissors, picture books and glue for a cut and paste activity. Children did so and when finished they returned the material to their places.

There were, however, times when some children would need to be told what to do, like taking the scissors back to their original place. The GR practitioner reminded them to clean the area they were working on.

Children managed their learning environment very well. But there was little evidence during my visits of children being freely allowed to take out materials, work with them and then put them back. It seemed that children waited to be instructed by the GR practitioner, rather than use their own initiative.

GR practitioners' views

All of the GR practitioners were of the view that children try by all means to manage themselves though there are those who are struggling.

> *We train them to manage themselves through our daily routine programme. On arrival they greet other children and put away their bags. At some stage toilet routine follows (GRP 1).*
>
> *Not all children give us difficulty in managing themselves especially in toilet routine. What they do here at school is what they always do at their homes. Ours is to reinforce the good behaviour (GRP 2).*
>
> *...though in our daily programme we have time for toilet routine , snack time and other activities I always encourage them not to be afraid to come forward when one feels she needs to relieve herself (GRP 3).*

Two GR practitioners said their children found it difficult to organise any activities themselves. They simply engaged in an activity when instructed to do so by the GR practitioner. One said:

> *I have not seen them saying to me they want to play with this or that today or there is a certain activity that they think of doing. I think the issue of limited resources contribute to that limited opportunity of choices (GRP 1).*
>
> *When given a task these children will carry on with the task and finish it immediately. There are those, however, who would disturb others having not finished the given task (GRP 2).*

The third GR practitioner said that the children told her what they wanted to play with and carried on with the activity without any harm.

If they are given an opportunity to choose what they want to do they do so immediately. The problem I always experience with them is that they do not manage time. They will engage in an activity until you rush them to finish up (GRP 3).

All of the GR practitioners believed that for children to develop life skills they should be able to demonstrate acceptable behaviours in the classroom, at the school and at home. They also believed that parents are the ones who should provide as many opportunities as possible for children to practice some of the life skills, including healthy habits, acceptable behaviours and consistent routines.

4.7.1.4 Collect, analyse, organise and critically evaluate information

This CO requires GR practitioners to provide children with opportunities to collect information though observation using their senses from all sources, books, the environment or people and to analyse and organise the information and decide what is to be used.

In one school children did not have an opportunity to collect any information other than from the GR practitioner herself. The GR practitioner brought to the classroom a chart showing different flags form different countries. Children were asked to analyse the data in front of them: finding common colours in the flags.

In the second school, the concept ‘two’ was learnt. Children were required to collect all the information they knew around the new concept by means of brainstorming, showing examples in and outside the classroom. Finally they were instructed to look for pairs of objects in magazines and to cut them out.

In the third school children were learning about shapes. As they were told the shape names they identified them in and outside the classrooms. They were then given a variety of shapes to sort.

In all the schools there were activities of this sort being undertaken. I observed no opportunities for children to gather data in a freer way without the teacher-directed methods which are illustrated here. There were no opportunities during my observations for children to critical evaluate information (see 2.9.4).

4.7.1.5 Communicate effectively using visual, symbolic and/or language skills in various modes

In this section I deal with language using the same categories as those indicated in the NCS (see 2.9.5 and Appendix G).

Speaking and listening

In all of the schools, I was greeted with interest. The children were used to visitors. They spoke with ease, showing comfort and security.

On arrival, children greeted and talked to each other while the GR practitioners waited for the rest of the class to arrive. The GR practitioners instructed them to tell news (what they did after leaving school the day before and before coming to school this morning). As the activity progressed so the children wanted to talk more.

All the children in all schools understood that while one was speaking others had to listen. But because of their natural curiosity and interest in what they were doing or learning sometimes they jumped up and said what they thought. They freely expressed themselves at any time. At their level they communicated effectively as the messages were meaningful to me. For much of the time in all schools, however, there were children who would just shout out answers. This might have beenr elated to the GR practitioners' themselves shouting at the children.

In one school, the GR practitioner instructed some children to carry a message to others within the classroom. The purpose of that activity was to check and train children on listening skills and the ability to transfer messages in their originality. Children did as they were told by the GR practitioner, though the message had been changed as it reached the last child.

Children were listening to others when questions were asked so that they did not repeat answers. All of the children listened and followed simple instructions. There were no multiple instructions where children could exercise their ability to remember more than one instruction. Other activities included activities like listening to the GR practitioner talking when she gave instructions or told a story with a loud voice, listening to others talking, other students talking, and for the bell to ring for interval.

I did not observe the GR practitioners introducing new concepts and vocabulary either in their discussions with the children or with 'show and tell' discussions about the things to see in the environment (for example, insects, plants and stones) or the issues of the day (for example what happens when the rubbish is collected and where is it taken).

Reading and Writing

In all the classes I visited there were wall charts (mainly given by the DoBE) showing pictures such as the South Africa flag, road signs and the alphabet. They were however, very general, and I did not see them being used to teach new concepts and vocabulary, other than in one classroom to teach colours (see Figure 15).

To some extent GR practitioners had set out their classrooms to be print-rich. There were several examples of visual literacy in the classrooms such as the adverts seen on television and in the print media.

Only in one school where there was a book corner, though it did not have enough books, but during my observations only one GR practitioner was using a book with pictures when telling a story.

In no school did I see any activity where children were asked open-ended questions about a picture in front of them where they could demonstrate their development in the use of visual literacy.

Children could recognise their names as these were written on small flash cards and children were required to come forward and choose their names. Some children were unable to write their names but the GR practitioner said by the next term they would be better developed (see Figure 14).

GR practitioners' views

In all the schools children could talk easily to the GR practitioner and to other children. The GR practitioners said:

> *As I see them they are developing gradually. You will notice in the morning they freely express themselves from saying goodbye to the parents to their cheerful mood in the classroom when saluting other children. Even when it is their birthday they quickly tell you as they come to the classroom. All you need to do is to appreciate*

what they are doing so that they see the necessity to carry on with such behaviour (GRP 1).

Our children feel relaxed in the classroom. If you are teaching they are not afraid to say anything they think of just in the middle of the lesson. Do not expect them to wait till you finish. They shout at any time (GRP 2).

At least they are promising to cope during the period of formal learning because they are able to tell their news and ask for things they need. Also what is important is that they try to speak in a group so as to show confidence (GRP3).

4.7.1.6 Use science and technology effectively and critically, showing responsibility towards the environment and health of others.

With this CO, GR practitioners are expected to provide children with developmentally appropriate opportunities to use tools of all types from rulers, to calculators to computers, household tools such as eating utensils, cleaning tools, and so on.

In all three schools there were crayons and scissors which served as technological tools. I saw no evidence however of tools for measuring such as scales, rulers and containers for water and sand. With shapes, for example, children could tell the kind of shape but not anything about measurement. During my observations there was very limited exposure to science and technology in all these schools.

In addition, I did not observe the GR practitioners helping children to use tools in the correct way, such as holding a pencil correctly or using scissors and knives competently.

GR practitioner views

GR practitioners said the lack of resources contributes highly to the low quality of learning and teaching in their classrooms.

We do not even have a television or computers where we can show children some films or anything interesting (GRP 1).

We used to have some of the resources including telephones, old computers and watch. These were helping children in their fantasy play. Unfortunately our school has been robbed by thieves and a lot has been taken while some were left damaged. Currently I am in the process of developing other resources (GRP 3).

I sometimes instruct them to collect pictures of animals where we are going to discuss about those live with us and those live in the bushes. Sometimes I even bring mixtures for different colours to show them what a mixture is (GRP 2).

4.7.1.7 Demonstrating an understand the world as a set of related systems

This CO requires GR practitioners to give children activities that will encourage them to relate one set of information and skill to another, for example, they can relate information from the theme of the week to their own lives at home. GR practitioners should help

learners to integrate their prior learning (what they already know) with new learning, and help learners to solve problems using information from previously solved problems.

With regards to this CO, all the schools were similar. Children were given an opportunity to relate what is learnt at school with what they know from home. Very few activities were offered to address the outcome. All that was done was to recite months of the year, days of the week, counting, and so on.

Grade R practitioner views

GR practitioners saw children as experiencing no difficulties with the school curriculum. They said that what they learn at school (official knowledge) was part of what they experienced in their daily lives at home (local knowledge) and at school.

> *Those colours, numbers and shapes they are learning at school are also available at home in form of clothes, furniture and house or registration motor vehicles numbers (GRP3).*

According to two GR practitioners, what children learned in one learning area could help them in another learning area.

> *I try by all means to equip children with basic skills of science and mathematics as they will use them in other learning areas as they develop. Some of these skills are observing, comparing, classifying, measuring and communicating (GRP1).*
>
> *It makes it easy for me and my children when we talk about things children know from their homes. If we use known examples they will understand it better (GRP 2).*

Although the GR practitioners' understood what was required by this CO in conversation with me, I saw and heard no evidence of the GR practitioners asking the children to link one idea to the other, or to think about what they already knew about a subject from another experience.

4.8 Summary of observations of and discussions on the COs

I have noted the quality of activities that children engaged in. They were average activities which required little planning and preparation by the GR practitioner and which also did not require much critical thinking either by the GR practitioners or by the children. What GR practitioners were doing was in contrast to what they understood about DAP and the COs in general.

It seems from this study that the GR practitioners generally did

- have a good relationship with the children
- set out their classrooms to be fairly print-rich (but not enough, with flash cards and labels for example)
- promote acceptable behaviours in the classroom and at the school including healthy habits, acceptable behaviours and consistent routines
- organise children to manage themselves and their routines well.

From the information that I collected on the practice of the CO's, it seems that the GR practitioners faced challenges in

- organising children to work together in cooperative groups to solve problems or to carry out tasks rather than instructing children in plenary activities
- making use of problem-solving as a way of teaching
- giving a choice of activities therefore using the few resources in different activities at the same time and avoiding conflict and boredom
- promoting the organised freedom of children to choose materials, work with them, and then replace them
- giving opportunities for children to gather data in a freer way without the teacher-directed methods which are illustrated here. There were no opportunities during my observations for children to critically evaluate information
- introducing new concepts and vocabulary in their discussions with the children and with 'show and tell' discussions about the things to see in the environment
- promoting a love of books and reading
- using open-ended questions in their daily practice
- providing a variety of simple available tools for children to use and helping children to use tools in the correct way such as holding a pencil correctly or using scissors and knives safely and effectively
- asking the children to link one idea to the other, or to think about what they already knew about a subject from another experience (integrated thinking)
- The GR practitioners method of teaching is teacher centred. I noted that children have to sit still and wait for the GR practitioner often
- giving more opportunities for structured play where children can explore and investigate their surroundings.

4.9 Support systems for DAP and the COs in GR within the school

In this section I discuss the support, within the school, given to the Reception Year GR practitioners and children. It has been structured according to support of the parents, the role of GR practitioners, the role played by Heads of Department (HOD) and lastly the principals.

4.9.1 Support for and by parents

Parents were not fully convinced of the support given to them from the school and from the GR practitioners. Examples of this are:

> *Parents only go to school for registration and graduation ceremony. There is no child's progress communication. You will only be called when the child has troubles or unless you have something dissatisfied with then you go to school (P4).*
>
> *I have not been to school since opened. Only for older children I go to school like when there are sport activities. The younger ones do not participate in sport activities (P1).*

A second parent was uncertain of the role of GR from her previous experience of the school. The expectation of the parent was that a child should be prepared by school to read and to write at GR.

> *My boy is behind his peers academically. I do not know whether the problem is with my child or the previous GR practitioner did not help the child (P2).*
>
> *I do not know exactly what they are learning. Sometimes I hear her singing some song and chanting verses. Other than that I have not seen her doing anything about writing (P3).*

But on the other hand, principals spoke of the opportunities they gave parents to interact with the school and with the GR practitioners as, for example, when parents were given opportunities to discuss the progress of their children each term with the GR practitioner. One principal noted

> *When schools are closing we have a portfolio day where parents come and view their children's work and have discussions with the GR practitioner (Pr3).*

Showing that there was little proper communication between the schools and the homes practitioners said:

> *You call the parent during the year but they do not turn up. Some of them do not even come at the end of the year to collect reports about child's progress. Instead the parents send older children to collect the reports (Prt 2).*
>
> *Even when you had an opportunity to talk to the parent you will notice that she does not expect to be responsible for helping her child learn except providing basic needs (Prt3).*

Practitioners always report in a staff meeting that they called certain parents for different reasons but parents did not come (HOD 1).

4.9.2 GR practitioners

In this section I set up the data gathered from three GR practitioners into:

- The kind of support they get within the school
- The kind of training they get during the year

In response to the question of what kind of support they get from the school, GR practitioners responded as follows:

The school supports GR like other grades. We are provided with available material and we request like others. Sometimes I get assistance from those people who are currently doing studies about GR, not within the school (GRP 1).

Our principal shows much interest in GR. When there is a staff meeting she allows me to voice any concerns I have. When ordering school learning material, she makes sure that GR material has been ordered, though she would tell me she knows nothing about GR. She depends on what I say about GR learning material (GRP 2).

All the teachers in our school show interest in this class. If I am absent from work the principal request any teacher to put an eye in my children. Time and again I get the material I have requested. In fact the principal would only ask what do I want when the school orders learning and teaching material (GRP 3).

In all three schools, the GR practitioners said they got support from the school. The support they refer to mainly is the provision of learning material that is ordered.

In terms of monitoring, all the GR practitioners said they were not monitored because no one in the school knew exactly what should be done in GR. Not even one person in the school was interested in spending a few minutes to see how teaching and learning took place in the Reception Year classroom.

In reviewing training opportunities provided to them, GR practitioners responded as follows:

The principal informs me whenever there is a workshop. Unfortunately the workshops for GR specifically are very few. We are called as Foundation Phase (GRP1).

It has been a long time since we were on training I think it was last year. I don't remember being called to any training this year (GRP2).

Early this year we were called to a cluster workshop as FP in training for CAPS (GRP3).

The three said that in terms of support, more training was needed although they are called to workshops with grade 1 teachers for common planning. They have never been called to a workshop specifically for GR.

> *On the other hand, none of the other teachers in the school had ever been called to a workshop on GR (GRP1).*

GR practitioners, however, are not perceived as professional teachers by the teachers in the three schools. They are not undermined by the professional GR practitioners as 'mamas' from community-based programmes meaning they are valued to some degree. They also said that they did not want only a Level O4 FET Certificate in ECD - they did not trust it and wanted a proper teaching diploma (like the NPDE) or a degree (the B.Ed.).

GR practitioners, therefore, were not qualified to teach other grades except GR because of their low qualifications. Other than the issue of qualifications they did not get support, in terms of guidance, from their seniors.

4.9.3 Heads of Departments

In response to the question of support, HOD1 said that she monitored preparation once a month because they were told in a FP workshop that GR prepared themes that could last for a month. She also looked at GR practitioner records and gave guidance when necessary. These records included class register and children's clinic cards. She said

> *At my school we are supporting GR class by monitoring GR practitioner's work. As I am responsible for the FP GR is not left behind. They are required to make submissions of assessment records when it is time to do that like all other educators (HOD1).*

HOD1 did not monitor more than the records. She did not visit the GR class. In her explanation of support given to GR she, however, mentioned the fact that the school was given LTSM by the District Office but that there was no continuous monitoring of how material was used. This is because there were no classroom visits and therefore no monitoring of effective teaching and learning. She said

> *GR material is ordered and given to the GR practitioner. I have never been to her classroom to see if the material is used. The GR practitioner only submit the required documents when needed (H1).*

HOD 2 agreed with the comments of HOD1. She monitored the planning and records of children as well. She also said she always informed the GR practitioner of any workshops.

> *Whenever Integrated Quality Management System (IQMS) is done GR practitioners take part as a way of promoting professional growth. We want them to feel being part of the school (HOD2).*
>
> *It is difficult to give guidance to the GR practitioner because I am not sure of what is exactly happening in that class. My support is only on providing what is requested by the GR practitioner (H2).*

HOD3 said her support was limited to making sure that children received meals daily and that LTSM was delivered to the GR classroom. She said:

> *I make it a point that children get meals at interval time. If the GR practitioner needs any LTSM she asks that and I submit requisition to the principal (HOD3).*

From the discussions it is clear that the role HODs were playing therefore was confined to providing LTSM and making sure that GR practitioners did planning like other educators. About actual learning and teaching in the classroom they were not sure and therefore support was minimal. There was no sign that HODs were interested in finding out more about GR. It seemed that GR was isolated within the schools in this study.

4.9.4 School principals

The three school principals I interviewed were also asked how they support the Reception Year. In response they said:

> *I make sure that learner support material is available when the GR practitioner needs it. When other grades place their orders for teaching and learning material GRs do so as well (Pr1).*
>
> *I always instruct the caretaker to look at the playing grounds for children - if are there any dangerous materials like broken bottles before children play there. We work hand in hand with the Department of Health (DoH). They come to school to give vaccines to children when necessary (Pr2).*

All of them said they make sure that the school nutrition programme was always available as some parents could not afford to give children a lunch box every day. They also agreed on buying learning and teaching support material when necessary or when money was allocated for that.

Principals 1 and 3 saw GR classes as chaotic because the children were talking at will and moving around with noise and little time sitting down. They said they were different from other grades where children were sitting with a minimal level of noise.

The type of support for GR again incorporated only the routine actions that principals undertook for the whole school: LTSM delivery, cleared playground space and health issues of nutrition and vaccinations. None of the three principals, like the HODs, seemed to have made any effort to incorporate GR into the school by developing an understanding of the nature of GR or the NCS outcomes required by the children.

4.10 Summary of findings in terms of the research methodology

In this section, I give a brief summary of the research processes that I undertook. I relate this to the information I set out in Chapter 3.

I conducted the research in three primary schools neighbouring the school in which I teach. To begin the research process, I visited the school principals with a letter informing them of my role as a researcher interested in knowing how teaching and learning took place in the Reception Year, and requesting formal permission to conduct the research in their schools. The principals undertook to inform the District Office (DO) of the research, and gave me permission in writing to visit the GR classrooms. On the same day I negotiated suitable dates and times for classroom visits (see Appendix A).

I explained that my role as a researcher with both principals and GR practitioners was not to impose changes in the way teaching and learning was conducted, but that through my research, I would communicate my findings and possible recommendations to all at the time of the visits and again at the end of the research period. In addition I explained fully the research ethics I would employ throughout the data gathering and reporting process (see 3.8).

I explained to the GR practitioners that all I needed was to observe learning and teaching in their classrooms and to ask them questions for discussion on issues needing clarity. We discussed the possible dates and times for classroom visits with all of them for the different times.

I emphasised that they needed to feel as free and as comfortable as possible to talk and to raise issues during the process. They gave me permission to take photographs about anything of interest to the study.

On the introductory days of observation there was a little tension from the GR practitioners during the first few minutes of the observations which I suspect was because they thought I was one of the education officials. To make them feel at ease I participated in the lesson with them by asking questions and interacting with the children for them to relax as well. I noticed that as the process went on, that they were feeling more comfortable with me being there. The indicators of their growing relaxing attitudes included joining in with my questions that I asked children and laughing and playing with them. As the lesson progressed the GR practitioner would come to me to inform me of the children's behaviour at that stage.

After one and half hours of observation in each site, I requested the GR practitioner to give me some time to discuss with her some of what I observed, as we had agreed at the beginning. We used the same classroom she used with children. By that time the children were playing outside waiting for their parents to take them home (they were not supervised as usual). The GR practitioners saw nothing wrong as she said they were playing just in front of the classroom. Their feelings were that if anything went wrong they would be able to attend to it as other children would quickly report to her. This same procedure was carried out in all the sites I visited. That meant children in all these sites were not supervised during the interviews.

The interviews took about 30 to 40 minutes. During the interview with the GR practitioners, I asked questions for clarity about my perceptions and understandings of what I had observed. Most of my questions were open-ended to give the GR practitioners space to elaborate.

The GR practitioners responded to all the questions I asked. All of them showed understanding and awareness of the whole concept of GR and DAP. The challenge I had while conducting interviews was that I had to rephrase almost all the questions.

Where necessary I asked permission to go back for further observations and discussions.

I interviewed the parents and school personnel (HODs and principals) on separate days after the school day had ended.

All the data that had been gathered through observations and interviews from both parents and GR practitioners was organised into themes and patterns to be discussed in this chapter.

My lack of experience in observations was evident as I found out, at the end of the first observations and discussions, that the data I had collected was not enough. I then broadened my next observations to yield more data as Cohen *et al.(*2000, p.305) put it 'observations enables researchers...to see things that might otherwise be missed unconsciously, to discover things that participants might not talk about freely in the interview situation, to move beyond perception-based data, and to access personal knowledge'. I needed much more time for both observations and interviews.

I found that I also needed much more time than I had first planned to collect the data, to write it all down as my field notes and as transcriptions from the interviews.

I discussed the need for 'thick' description in Section 3.6.3 and 3.6.4. I found however, that it was not possible to do justice to the thickness of the descriptions when I conducted the interviews and the observations because of the time constraints that I faced. I make recommendations about this dilemma in 5.7.1

4.11 Conclusion

In this chapter I have summarised the information from the three schools in which the study took place and which deals with the purpose and objectives and research questions.

In the final chapter I discuss the findings of this research, make some tentative conclusions and set out recommendations developed from the findings and conclusions.

Chapter 5 Discussion of Findings, Conclusions and Recommendations

5.1 Introduction

As indicated in the previous chapters the purpose of this study was to explore the extent to which young children are exposed to developmentally appropriate opportunities for learningin order to achieve the COs as outlined in the South African National School Curriculum and the CAPS.

The research objectives formed the guidelines for the structuring of each chapter. The objectives are to gain insight into

1. ways in which parents perceive their children's developmental needs and their own role in this as well as the role of GR practitioner in providing developmentally appropriate activities
2. ways in which GR practitioners implement, through their teaching methodology (using the COs), the GR curriculum in a developmentally appropriate way
3. the competences that young children in the GR programmes achieve with regard to the COs in the National Curriculum Statement
4. ways in which GR classes are supported within the schools.

In this chapter I discuss the findings in relation to the review of the literature. I then draw conclusions on the findings. All conclusions are related to the three schools and GR classrooms only. They are not generalizable, unless readers wish to take the points and apply them to their own situations.

Recommendations are made to deal with these conclusions. Again, they are relevant only to the respondents and particularly to the school management and GR practitioners, since the parents will have moved on, with their children to the higher grades. The GR practitioners and the principals and HODs which form the school management team (SMT) will need to take responsibility for incorporating new parents into the activitiesof GR which promote the COs.

I focus on

- recommendations to present to the respondents in the schools
- recommendations for my own practice as a teacher of Grade 5 children

- recommendations for future research.

I intend to hold meetings at each school (with permission and support from each principal and SMT) to give a report back to them about the findings and conclusions and possible recommendations. This will follow a meeting with each GR practitioner and also with each set of parents from that class, to discuss the findings and to ensure that she is deeply involved in looking for solutions to the challenges she faces in delivering educational opportunities to the children in line with DAP and the COs.

The following themes, in line with the objectives and research questions of the study, form the discussion in this chapter:

1. The developmentally appropriate context of learning and the relevance of Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory
2. Perceptions of DAP by parents and GR practitioners
3. Children's learning in terms of the COs
4. Support systems for DAP and the COs in GR within the school.

5.2. The developmentally appropriate context of learning

In this section I discuss ways in which parents perceive their children's developmental needs and their own role in this as well as the role of the GR practitioner in providing developmentally appropriate activities. This is contrasted with the need of the school curriculum to focus upon school-readiness through the activities demanded by the NCS (see Appendix G).

I begin by briefly referring to the developmental contexts of families, neighbourhood and schools in NU8.

In the literature review, I discussed Bronfenbrenner's theory of the ecology of the child. I discussed in particular the systems which surround the child and impact upon her development. I discussed also the three principles of DAP, the third of which stated that the social and cultural contexts in which children live (the values, expectations, and behavioural and linguistic conventions of families and neighbourhoods and communities of interest) must be meaningfully and respectfully built upon so that learning experiences

in the school are relevant (2.6). Both theories emphasise the importance of the family, the neighbourhood and the school in the life of the child.

In the following sections, I compare the findings of this study with these theories, using the categories of the profiles of parents and GR practitioners; nutrition; safety and security; available space and LTSM at home and in the schools.

5.2.1 Profiles of parents, GR practitioners and SMTs

It was interesting to note that all of the respondents were women. In 3.7.1.2, I briefly discussed this phenomenon, and I was prepared for it- being a man in a feminised profession. I was interested to see also that all of the parents chosen were women. No fathers were involved in the interviews.

Parents were all qualified at similar levels as the GR practitioners and school personnel and two of the six were teachers were working as GR practitioners.

The qualifications of school personnel were all low in the three schools. The GR practitioners met the minimum level of qualification demanded by the DoBE. As explained in 2.10.2 this qualification enabled the practitioners to work under the in-depth supervision of a professional educator. From my observations, however, I had not seen nor heard of any supervision by a professional educator. GR practitioners, therefore, were in danger, as they were not supervised, of not providing young children with appropriate opportunities to achieve the COs.

The GR practitioners were faced with the demands of the NCS outcomes that they had to achieve with the children as well as having to face the demands of children who naturally want to work through the COs. It was a challenge therefore for the GR practitioners to deliver according to the NCS expectations of them, with a very low basic qualification and without any supervision. There were also the challenges of having no clear accessible information about further courses and career paths.

5.2.2 Nutrition

In 2.7.1 and in 4.3.1 I discussed the nutrition programmes in the schools together with the phenomenon of the lunch boxes that children bring from home. While the food offered the children at the school was generally nourishing, it was at risk of being

irregular because of challenges from the payment of funds to the workers and suppliers. The lunch boxes being sent to school with the GR children seemed to be a tradition from the past when GR was not part of public schooling, and the challenge here was that food in the lunch boxes tended to include unhealthy 'junk food'. Two of the schools had school gardens, but children were not involved in any of the schools in doing the gardening and the vegetables produced were used mainly by the gardeners themselves.This was in contrast to the need for good nutrition as part of developmentally appropriate practice.

5.2.3 Safety and security

The three schools were safely fenced (4.3.2.1) as required in the theory of DAP (2.7.2). Although the grounds were cleared in most cases (for example by the caretakers) there seemed to be no programme for the children to manage their own safety from glass and waste materials.

Children all went out to play during interval together. This meant that the GR children were sharing the few pieces of equipment that were available for play with older children, and at risk of bullying from older children. This was made worse by the fact that no GR practitioner or teacher supervised and managed play during the intervals. This was not only against the law and against professional ethics of the teachers and practitioners', but also potentially dangerous for the children who were deprived as well of focused activities outside.

Children enjoyed being in the company of their GR practitioners except when they were shouted at by the GR practitioners. This impacted upon the general feelings of safety and security in the schools.

5.2.4 Available space

In discussed available space in terms of DAP in 2.7.3. The majority of land in NU8 is occupied by houses with very few resource sites such as the clinic, some mini-market shops and the schools. There are no playgrounds for children. Children play in the streets where there are few resources to develop small and large muscles other than in running and ball games. The streets are not well maintained. Very few are tarred. As these streets were not designed for children to play on they are dangerous.

This situation is mirrored in the schools, where there are few resources for physical development either inside the classrooms or in the school yards. In two of the three schools there was sufficient space for the numbers of children but in all schools, the space was taken up by too many tables and chairs. This affected the opportunities that children had for practising the COs (see 5.2.4) because the GR practitioners tended to give only teacher-directed plenary activities as a result (see 5.2.4).

5.2.5 LTSM at home and in the schools

In the neighbourhood of NU8, few displays for literacy development were found in the surroundings, except for house numbers and shop names. There are no street names and traffic signs for literacy development.

Parents noted that while all had television and bought their children toys when they could, none were families which promoted reading and books.

The GR classrooms mirrored this situation (4.3.4.1).

This meant that children were not embedded in a culture of the education and learning for school readiness (NCS) outside of the social learning that occurred naturally at home, in the neighbourhood and to some extent at school.

5.2.6 Recommendations for the schools and GR practitioners

From the evidence presented here (based in the review of the literature and the findings of the research), it seems that the environment was not developmentally appropriate for education and learning of the type laid down by the curriculum for GR, that is 'school-readiness' (see 2.3.1 and Appendix G) to take place either at the level of family and neighbourhood or in the schools and GR classrooms. Learning of course took place in all these settings but not in the 'official' areas required by the schooling system. This may have to do not only with available resources and the environment in which the children live, but also with the differences in understanding of the role of education. I discuss this in the following point.

Recommendations to make to the three schools will include the following: to

1. clarify the roles of fathers in the education of their children and to make plans to include them in this, for example in science and technology to begin with

2. clarify the roles and responsibilities of all school personnel regarding GR, including the issues of expected outcomes of GR (in the NCS), supervision support and mentoring of GR practitioners and needs within the school for career path qualifications as well as for courses to understand the requirements of GR for all teachers in the school
3. discuss the nutrition programme and to work with the parents to resolve the issues of lunch box contents (if the lunch boxes are to be retained) so that it benefits each child in the school according to her needs
4. promote the theme of gardening by involving all the children and teachers in a school project for vegetable growing
5. discuss the law of delict with the schools and the professional and legal importance of supervision in the playground at all times for safety and for educational reasons (promoting opportunities for learning new competences)
6. decide whether it is useful to give the GR children intervals outside different to the intervals for the older children so that they can play without the fear of bullying and with all of the available equipment at their disposal
7. encourage families to come to visit the GR classes to watch their children working with available materials and then to hold workshops (with refreshments and music perhaps) to make materials from available waste materials for their children
8. promote the feelings of safety and security that children already have by discussing alternative approaches to discipline for example, lowering voices
9. discuss the challenge of providing free access to resources and materials and to informal groupings for play within and outside the classrooms so that children are not constrained by tables and chairs
10. promote reading and books in the daily programme and the participation of families in family literacy and numeracy programmes.

5.3 Perceptions of DAP by parents and GR practitioners

In this section I set out the main points from the findings on DAP. I have separated the view of the parents from those of the GR practitioners.

5.3.1 Parental perceptions of DAP

The 'good child'

The 'good child' was defined by parents (and to some extent by the GR practitioners as well) as one who is socially aware and able to integrate with others, able to listen well

and to carry out instructions (4.4.2). This contrast with the definition given in White Paper 5 which focuses more upon economic arguments such as productivity and cost savings (2.3.1) and therefore on the concept of the 'good child' as one who is competent in literacy and in numeracy as well.

The different focuses relate to the argument by Nsamenang (2006) (in 2.2.1, 2.5.5 and especially in 2.10.2: Challenges facing parents) that there is a clash of values, expectations and ways of being and doing, between the 'official' curriculum and ways of being with children and developing senses of belonging and becoming.

The differences may also affect the importance that parents attach to GR and attendance. It was noted (4.3.5) that in all visits there were several children not in attendance and that the reasons given for this led me to believe that parents may not have thought that GR was a vital educational stage in their children's lives.

With regards to the importance of attendance in schools, Scheerens (1998 cited in South Africa DoE, 2005, p.49) said international studies on school effectiveness indicated that regular attendance by both learners and teachers was important for learning to take place.

But some children were enrolled in the GR classes before they were legally allowed to register (4.3.5). This was either as a result of the school having to increase its numbers or that parents and principals were not aware of the age requirements. This had some impact upon the class and teaching styles, so that five year olds may not have received full attention cognitively as there were younger ones needing attention as well.

Almost all parents had a good understanding of what child development is. They knew that child development involves all areas of development. Parents defined some characteristics which were visible in their own young children, but generally seemed to see their roles and responsibilities as only helping children to feel secure and loved by providing for their needs such as the lunch box, clean clothes, medication and general school needs.

Learning at home and at school

Generally parents appreciated what GR Practitioners were doing for their children. They were happy to see their children being able count and to name colours and shapes. They were impressed by the skills children were demonstrating when at home such as the daily routines carried out at school such as healthy habits like washing hands and talking politely to other people. They did not take responsibility for being the primary educators of their own children, although the examples of competences that the children demonstrated were those which they had learned at home, rather than the school readiness competences of the NCS. The parents did not see themselves as responsible for promoting literacy and numeracy. Their assumption was that the GR practitioners would take that part of academic development. I address this further in 5.4 below.

Wells (cited in Myhill, 2005, p.9) noted that scaffolding learning in the classroom, for the teacher, is not the same as for the parent at home because parent-child interactions are more supportive and developmental than those found in teacher-child conversation in the classroom. This was noted in the classrooms where individualised learning and activities were not encouraged, in the plenary style of teaching generally used.

The issue of who should provide developmentally appropriate opportunities and to what extent seemed, therefore, to be a challenge between parents and GR practitioners.

5.3.2 Perceptions of DAP of the school personnel

GR practitioners were very clear on the concept of DAP as the provision of opportunities for children to develop holistically. They claimed that it involved guiding children on what and what not to do. They believed that development is carried out at home where the children spend a lot of time while GR practitioners are more cognitively focused, although their practice seemed to be contrary to what they said.

5.3.3 Recommendations for the schools and GR practitioners

There seemed to be a conflict between the idea of the purpose of DAP of the parents and the GR practitioners compared to the guidelines laid down in the NCS. Both parents and GR practitioners' seemed to focus more on the social and emotional development of the child and the physical well-being of the child and to neglect the school-readiness aspect of cognitive development (the NCS).

In addition, there seemed to be confusion about the roles and responsibilities of parents and GR practitioners.

Recommendations to take to the parents and schools for discussion include the following:

1. the 'good child' in South Africa now, and the competences we need now and in the future to live productive and fulfilled lives
2. DAP and how to implement this at home and at school
3. roles of the parents, GR practitioners and teachers as jointly responsible in developing children appropriately and in conjunction with the NCS requirements with practical actions for achieving this.

5.4 Children's learning in terms of the COs

As I discussed in 2.7 and in 2.8, and reported on in 4.3.3, 4.3.4 and 4.5, children's learning depends on a conducive environment prepared by an adult.

In this section I begin with a brief discussion on the focus and method for the NCS as a whole. I then conclude and make recommendations on the use of each of the COs in the GR classroom.

5.4.1 Teaching the NCS

In the FP the main focus in the NCS is on literacy, that is, to give children foundations of speaking, listening, reading, writing, reasoning and effective language for learning, numeracy and for Life Skills (2.8.1 and Appendix G). With regards to literacy in general, the three GR practitioners believed that for children to be developed in literacy they should be able to read words around the classroom, repeat rhymes and speak to the rest of the class.

From my observations the word 'literacy' meant reciting colours, shapes, months of the year and days of the week. An opportunity for discussion was not encouraged (except in the informal conversations the children had with each other as they worked and played),

even in stories. With maths I observed that GR practitioners were only interested in providing the 'traditional' activities like ' 2+1 = 3'.

There was little motivation for children to love books. They were not encouraged to touch the books or to show an interest in any of the books. Stories were told to the children rather than being read to them so children in these three classrooms did not learn how to handle books. I noted that GR practitioners therefore were depriving young children of developmental appropriate opportunities for reading.

I observed that most activities were directed by the GR practitioners. These findings are in line with what Wien (1995) explained (see 2.6) that what teachers know about effective learning opportunities does not coincide with their practice. There seemed to be a tension between what practitioners know from their training and what is expected of them when it comes to curriculum delivery.

Children were taught more in plenary groupings than otherwise. This meant that the children spent periods of time waiting for the GR practitioner to teach rather than being fully active in their own learning (see 4.7.1.3 and 4.8).

To some degree communication was encouraged by practitioners through the use of visual aids. Promotion of visual literacy was minimal as there were few pictures about the stories being read to the children.

I have noted the type and level of activities that children engaged in. These were everyday activities that did not provide opportunities to explore new competence or require much use of creative or critical thinking. What practitioners were doing was contrary to what they understood about DAP and child development in general.

Few opportunities therefore were given for play. Through observations in all the schools, play was not used as the main learning and teaching strategy. Children used play mostly when outside, where they choose what they want to play with, which in itself depends on the availability of outdoor equipment. Practitioners themselves, therefore, do not consider play as a learning strategy although it is cited as a major method for learning (Appendix G and in the literature, for example in Davin and van Staden (2005).

5.4.2 Using the COs as teaching methodology

I gave a summary in 4.8 of how GR practitioners promoted and did not promote the use of the COs by the children. The findings revealed that GR practitioners did not understand the practical use of the COs as methodology for their teaching and therefore did not provide activities using these methods for learning.

5.4.3 Recommendations for the schools and GR practitioners

I recommend that a series of meetings be held with the three schools (if they would like this to occur) to discuss ways to implement the COs as teaching method within the new CAPS which is to be implemented in 2012. It would be useful if all teachers were to attend because GR practitioners are so isolated at present in their work (see 4.9). This would be in line with the requirements of the school management teams to provide support for the curriculum (see 5.5)

The meetings would build on their strengths, which included good relationships with the children, print-rich classrooms (posters), managing routines in the classroom so that children manage themselves well. The meetings would need to focus also upon GR practitioners, and the issue of being supported at all times by the school personnel (HoDs and principals), and in conjunction with the parents of the children. Discussions could take place in the school community on how to implement the COs as teaching method (see 2.9 for practical suggestions). This would include helping children to

- identify and solve problems and make decisions using critical and creative thinking by offering activities for children to undertake these actions. this would mean discussing problem-posing as a way of teaching for example by using open-ended questions in daily practice
- work effectively with others as members of a group by organising children to work together in cooperative groups to solve problems or to carry out tasks rather than instructing children in plenary activities
- organise and manage themselves and their activities responsibly and effectively by promoting the organised freedom of children to choose materials, work with them and then put them back both in the restricted indoor spaces and outside where activities can be set up as an extension of the indoor space
- collect, analyse, organise and critically evaluate information by offering activities which enable children to explore their own environment within the school yard for

example, or by inviting guests to come to demonstrate skills to the children and to tell stories about their lives and the lives of the neighbourhood and country. Discussions need to take place around opportunities for children to gather data in a freer but still managed way without the teacher-directed methods used at present

- communicate effectively with each other, adults and between home and school by introducing new concepts and vocabulary and by encouraging a more advanced use of speaking and listening and reasoning using the new CAPS documents which give information on how to do this practically
- use science and technology effectively and critically, showing responsibility towards the environment and health of others by collecting sets of ordinary tools used every day (scissors, knives, needles and cotton, pencils, rulers and so on) and helping children to use tools in the correct way such as holding a pencil correctly or using scissors and knives safely and effectively
- demonstrate an understand the world as a set of related systems by asking the children to link one idea to the other, or to think about what they already knew about a subject from another experience (integrated thinking) before giving new information and new experiences. Reflection on the experiences is important for this CO.

5.5 Support systems for DAP and the COs in GR within the school

I found that GR practitioners were supported by the school mainly in the provision of learning material that the principal or HODs requisition for all grades and the checking of records and ensuring that GR children are included in the nutrition programme.

The school leadership and management role, however, was not otherwise involved in supporting, monitoring, mentoring and coaching the (under-qualified) GR practitioners. This may be because the school personnel were not sure about the purpose and curriculum requirements for GR.

In 2.12.3, however, it is stated clearly that school principals have the sole responsibility for staff training programmes, both school based and externally directed, and to assist teachers, particularly new and inexperienced teachers, in developing and achieving educational objectives in accordance with needs of the school. That seemed not to be happening as GR practitioners noted that they did not get workshops specifically for GR and that the rest of the school did not receive information on GR either.

The SMT in each school was not aware of what was happening inside the GR class and therefore did not know what support was needed by practitioners. That is a challenge because if the DBE does not organise support for the school leadership, the SMTs will have to organise themselves to undertake competent classroom visits as a strategy for supporting GR practitioners.

5.5.2 Recommendations for the schools and GR practitioners

From the evidence presented here (based in the review of the literature and the findings of the research), it seems that GR practitioners received little to no support from within the school for their responsibilities in carrying out the NCS. It is also clear that there is little liaison between the families (parents) of the children and the GR classes. Recommendations therefore must include the following:

1. the SMT familiarise themselves with the GR curriculum in the CAPS (being implemented in 2012) and with the concepts of school readiness and child-friendliness (see 2.3.2)
2. to implement an action plan to work very closely with the GR practitioner and the parents of the children
3. and work with the Grade 1 teachers to ensure continuation of the methodology of DAP and the COs within CAPS.

5.6 Recommendations for my own practice as an IP teacher

The study helped me a lot as an IP teacher. The challenges I identified are also found in my school. I have learnt that as much as it is the requirement of Department of Basic Education to implement NCS and provide evidence, it is my responsibility as well to consider the context underwhich children learn, the uniqueness of children in my classroom and involvement of parents in their children's learning.

I indicated in chapter 1 that the ANA results in my school showed low levels of achievement. I intend to ask permission from the school principal to make a presentation of this study to both teachers and parents. This may help the rest of teachers in my school so that everybody has a better understanding of what issues contribute to children's abilities to learn. This will also help parents with children in my school so that they know their responsibility in helping their children learn.

5.7 Recommendations for future research

In this section, I look at two issues: my own practice as a researcher, and recommendations for future research in this area of interest.

5.7.1 Recommendations for my own practice as a researcher

In 4.10, I set out the research process that I followed, in accordance with the information I set out in chapter 3.. Here I set out the conclusions I have come to regarding my own development as a researcher and as a teacher. I follow this with recommendations for future research for myself, or for others.

The research process was challenging for me because I had no experience of teaching in the Reception Year. I am an IP teacher. I depended mostly on my theoretical understanding of ECD which I gained during my B.Ed. Honours studies and on the substantial literature review I undertook for this study (which in itself needed to be scrutinised as most of it is based on western countries with little relating to the South African context).

The issue of gender was also one of the challenges I came across in this study. When I was approaching the school principals requesting to observe in their schools I noticed that they were amazed to see a male teacher, of grade 5, interested in the Reception

Year. Every time I visited the schools I had to remind them that I was registered as a student as they seemed to think I was there on behalf of the DoBE.
Before this study was conducted, I was of the notion that reading and writing are not part of GR but grade 1. This study helped me to understand that children in the Reception Year are not forced to read and write but are introduced to the two aspects, hence the use of the term, emergent literacy and numeracy. It is very important to develop an early interest in reading and writing, enabling children to express themselves in their own writing besides the issue of writing their names. I have also learnt that the two, reading and writing cannot be separated.

My understanding now around the whole concept of child development and in particular young children is better than before I undertook this study. I must mention that in my first day of observation in the Reception Year I was at risk of forgetting what I wanted to observe because I was so excited to see how young children express themselves with their GR practitioner. They were not constrained by rules and atmosphere in the classroom as they are in my primary school.

The study not only helped me to understand GR practitioners' and parents' beliefs but also informed me in my own teaching about the importance at all times of providing children with developmentally appropriate opportunities and active activities in co-operative learning groups.

As an emergent researcher, the study helped me to create my understanding of the logical steps in writing research and how to use relevant methodologies like interviewing and observing. I became knowledgeable about the phenomena I studied through exposure to the academic and professional literature, observations and interviews and the writing process.

As already mentioned in chapter 3 this is a small scale study and therefore the results cannot be generalised but could be applicable to other schools in similar contexts. Only three practitioners, one per research site, three principals and three HODs with six parents, (two in each school) were interviewed. Time constraints prevented me from obtaining the perspective of more parents.

Another limitation was lack of experience on my side as an interviewer. The kinds of questions I asked in my first round of observation did not give me the kind of data that will help me to achieve my research goals. I had to change research questions time and again. This mean that I had to organise time off from my own teaching to repeat observation visits. As a result, I was not able to develop the 'thick' descriptions I intended as part of this qualitative study.

In addition, I noted that the purposive sampling that I used to select the parent respondents was flawed. While the parents were purposively selected by the GR practitioners according to the criteria of nearness to the schools and availability for interview, I believe that I should have added further criteria to make sure that the parents were perhaps more representative of the parent group as a whole. For example, two of the selected parents were also employed as GR practitioners in other programmes. They would have perhaps given 'correct' answers from their own training, rather than according to their own realities as parents of children.

In future research I will need to:

- arrange more time to carry on with the study of this nature. It was difficult to leave children I teach and go for observations. Time will also help in conducting number of observationsand to develop the required 'thick' descriptions.
- having time it will also help in choosing more respondents so that I can yield more data. These include education officials and municipal officials as they are the ones responsibly to NU8 area.
- to organise equipment on time. These include camera and audio tape recorder so that I can gather information whenever I need or opportunity presents itself.
- have a clear understanding of what questions I need to ask, before I even go for observations not only what I am interested in.

5.7.2 Suggestions for future research

I set out three suggestions for further research. They are

1. the status of the father and man in the home as parent, in the school as teacher and as parent. I noted that men were not engaged formally as parents in GR and in the FP. I was perceived as a stranger to the FP and struggled to be seen as a researcher rather than as a person in charge (from the DoBE)

2. an action research study investigating the process of developing DAP and the COs within a school as preferred forms of teaching for learning. This would be relevant in terms of the recommendations I have made here, which lead me to believe that a series of 'workshops' or meetings with each school is required rather than just a single report-back meeting on the research.
3. the role of international literature, in particular that of the west, in developing competence in public primary schools. In this study I began with an investigation into the ways in which DAP and the Critical Outcomes in the National Curriculum Statement are being used in three GR classrooms in Mdantsane. I explored this in terms of the existing western research into child development, which forms the basis of the White Paper 5 (South Africa, 2001) and of the NCS.

   In the course of my reading, however, I came across the research of Nsamenang (2006), Serpell (cited in Benson, 2003), and Marfo and Biersteker (2011), amongst others. Serpell for example (cited in Benson, 2003), noted

   > *When rural parents in Africa talk about the intelligence of children, they prefer not to separate the cognitive speed aspect of intelligence from the social responsibility aspect.*

He also noted (cited in Benson, 2003) that simply translating a Western test into the local language is not enough. Instead, it is critical to tailor each test to the needs and values of the culture in which it is to be used. Unless that happens, said Serpell,

> *…you're just going to be able to pick out more efficiently those individuals who would be considered intelligent by Western standards, but you're not going to be able to answer the question of whether you're picking out people who are most intelligent according to the standards of their culture.*

Their views on DAP, teaching for the COs and the meaning of child development theories in Africa require further research here. When I continue with my studies, this may be an approach which I would wish to consider in the context of GR and FP in Mdantsane's public schooling system.

5.8 Conclusions

This conclusion is in two parts: conclusions for this chapter and final conclusions for the study.

5.8.1 Conclusions for the chapter

In this chapter I discussed the findings of my research purpose which was to explore the role that GR practitioners play in providing young children in selected classrooms in Mdantsane with developmentally appropriate learning opportunities in order to achieve the COs as outlined in the South African National School Curriculum and the CAPS. I made conclusions and recommendations for future research.

5.8.2 Conclusions for the study

The purpose and objectives for this study have been addressed.

The findings tentatively show that

1. parents perceived their children's developmental needs and their own roles in this as separate to that of the GR practitioners' role. They perceived their roles mainly in developing social and emotional competence within the family and broader community as the 'good child'. They perceived the role of the GR practitioner as providing literacy and numeracy teaching to their children. They seemed not to note the practical mutual collaboration in this endeavour.
2. GR practitioners did not implement, through their teaching methodology (using the COs), the GR curriculum in a developmentally appropriate way during the observations that I made
3. the competences that young children in the GR programmes achieved with regard to the COs in the National Curriculum Statement were learned incidentally during my observations, that is, not deliberately, through the GR practitioners' planned activities
4. the three GR classes were not supported within the schools to deliver competent curriculum activities to the children.

Therefore the purpose of this study, which was to explore the extent to which young children are exposed to developmentally appropriate opportunities for learningin order to achieve the COs as outlined in the South African National School Curriculum and the CAPShas led to the overall tentative conclusion that the three GR practitioners are in need of strong support and mentoring to be able to achieve this. It seems that, without a

high level of support, they will not be able to promote the NCS (and CAPS from 2012) so that children are ready to use the COs in their school lives and so that their classes are child-ready and child-friendly.

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Personal Communications

Two colleagues allowed their comments to be used in this study in the Introduction (Chapter 1). Both preferred to remain anonymous. They spoke to me in May 2008.

Appendices

Appendix A Letter to school principals

The Principal
…….
…….
Dear Madam

Re: Study on teaching and learning in the Reception Year

I am a part-time student at Rhodes University and my student number is 699M3769. Since 2008 I have been studying for a Master in Education Degree in the field of Early Childhood Development, particularly on GR. I would be pleased if you can provide me with an opportunity to observe in one of GR classes in your school.

The purpose of my study ids to look at how practitioners provide children in the Reception Year with effective learning opportunities in order to achieve Critical Cross-field and Developmental Outcomes. I am interested in finding out more about the way in which learning and teaching takes place at this grade. The findings of your institution will help me in getting a better understanding of what GR is all about.

Data will be collected through observations, interviews with practitioners and parents, field notes, photographs and samples of children's work. In the whole study no names will be identified and published. Even the school will remain anonymous at all stages. There is no risk for the school to participate in this study.

I hope this request shall be granted and I would greatly appreciate your help in undertaking this study. If you are uncomfortable about anything arising from the research, you can contact my supervisor Ms Margaret Irvine (see contacts below).

Researcher
Mthetheleli Mnene
xxx Senior Primary School
Ph/Fax: 043 – 7622488

Supervisor
Margaret Irvine
Rhodes University
076 421 5859

Appendix B Letter to teachers

Dear GR practitioners

I am registered for a Master of Education Degree with Rhodes University. To qualify for my Master's Degree I am required to write a research report that specifically looks at how practitioners provide GR children with effective learning opportunities in order to achieve Critical cross-field and Developmental Outcomes.

In this case, I will be required to answer the following research questions:

1. How do GR practitioners perceive children's developmental needs and their own roles in implementing DAP?
2. How do GR practitioners implement the methodology of the COs?
3. What do children do and learn while they attend GR classes?
4. What support do the GR classes receive within the school in implementing DAP and the COs?

I request that you assist me answer the above research questions by completing the attached consent forms.

Your anonymity in this research is guaranteed.
Thank you
Yours sincerely
M. Mnene

Appendix C Letter to parents

Dear parents,

I am registered for a Master of Education Degree with Rhodes University. To qualify for my Master's Degree I am required to write a research report that specifically looks at how parents provide GR children with effective learning opportunities in order to achieve Critical cross-field and Developmental Outcomes.

In this case, I will be required to answer the following research questions:

1. What do parents perceive to be their own children's developmental needs?
2. What do you understanding about Developmentally Appropriate Practice?
3. What do you see as you own role in your child's development?
4. What do you see as GR practitioner' roles in supporting your child's development?

Your anonymity in this research is guaranteed.

Thank you
Yours sincerely
M. Mnene

(The original letter and all further correspondence was in isiXhosa)

Appendix D Consent Form 1 (From the Principal)

Mthetheleli Mnene is hereby given permission to conduct interviews and observe teachers as part of the process of data collection for her research report that he will be writing in completion of his Master's Degree. I am aware that interview transcripts and extracts will be used in the final report. I have also been assured that my school, teachers and I will have anonymity in that report.

Signed: ……. Date: ……

(The original letter and all further correspondence was in isiXhosa)

Appendix E Consent Form 2 (From GR practitioners)

I hereby agree to participate in an interview, classroom observations, document analysis as well as stimulated recall with Mthetheleli Mnene who is conducting research on provision of effective learning opportunities in the Reception Year by practitioners in order to achieve CCFDOs. I understand that he will be seeking answers for his research questions on how children learn while in the Reception Year.

I have been assured of anonymity in the final report.
Signed ……. Date:……..

Appendix F Consent Form 3 (From the parents)

I hereby agree to assist Mthetheleli Mnene in undertaking his research. I understand that he will careful about protecting my identity and the name of my child in the report.

Signed…….Date……

(The original letter and all further correspondence was in isiXhosa)

Appendix G Activities the GR practitioner should provide

This set of activities forms the basis of the GR practitioner's planning and daily programme activities. It is derived from the National Curriculum Statement (South Africa 2002). I have based my observations upon knowledge of these activities.

Promoting language

Providing activities for listening

In GR, the practitioner needs to provide activities which support

- listening attentively and responding to questions, instructions and announcements;
- appropriate listening behaviour by listening without interrupting, showing respect for the speaker, and taking turns to speak;
- listening with enjoyment to songs, rhymes, short poems and stories, and showing understanding of what she hears by acting out, joining in choruses, drawing pictures of the story, song or rhyme and so on.
- opportunities to recognise different and similar sounds within words and sentences.

Providing activities for speaking

The GR practitioner needs to encourage speaking as well. She does this by encouraging the children though the activities she has planned to

- talk about family and friends;
- express their own feelings and the feelings of real or imaginary people;
- sing and recite simple songs and rhymes;
- use language imaginatively for fun and fantasy (e.g. to make up rhyming words);
- ask questions when they do not understand or need more information, and respond clearly to questions asked of them.
- pass on messages;
- recount personal experiences;
- tell own stories and retell stories of others in own words;
- participate confidently and fluently in a group.
- show sensitivity when speaking to others;
- role-play different kinds and manners of speech (e.g. telephone conversation).

Providing activities for reading and viewing

The activities that the GR practitioner offers include

- making meaning by using visual clues (in pictures, photographs, and amongst the children and adults in the GR environment);
- identifying objects against their background in a picture;
- making sense of picture stories;
- matching pictures and words;
- using illustrations to understand simple captions in story books.

Children also need activities where they can

- role play reading books (handling the book in the relevant manner);

- distinguish pictures from print (e.g. by pointing to words rather than pictures when ‘reading’)
- make meaning of written text and to know that print carries meaning (e.g. that a written word can signify own name);
- have opportunities to ‘read’ in a group with the adult;
- make links to own experience when reading with the adult;
- start recognising and making meaning of letters and words and
- recognise that written words refer to spoken words.

Providing activities for writing

The GR practitioner should provide activities for the children which help them to understand the process of writing. This includes activities to

- experiment with writing by creating and using drawings to convey a message, and as a starting point for writing;
- forming letters in various ways (e.g. by using own body to show the shapes, writing in sand);
- understanding that writing and drawing are different;
- 'writing' and asking others to give the meaning of what has been written;
- talking about own drawing and 'writing;'
- role-playing 'writing' for a purpose (e.g. telephone message, shopping list);
- using known letters and numerals (or approximations) to represent written language, especially letters from own name and age;
- 'reading' own emerging writing when asked to do so;
- showing a beginning awareness of directionality (e.g. starting from left to right, top to bottom);
- copying print from the environment (e.g. labels on household items, advertisements);
- making attempts at familiar forms of writing, using known letters (e.g. in lists, messages or letters); and manipulating writing tools like crayons and pencils.

Providing activities for thinking and reasoning

The GR practitioner should provide activities for the children which help them to develop concepts such as

- demonstrating their developing knowledge of concepts such as quantity, size, shape, direction, colour, speed, time, age, sequence;
- using language to think and reason (identifying and describing similarities and differences;
- matching things that go together, and comparing things that are different;
- classifying things (e.g. puts all toys in box, books on shelves, crayons in tins);
- identifying parts from the whole (e.g. parts of the body).

Activities should also be provided which help children to

- use language to investigate and explore;
- ask questions and search for explanations;
- give explanations and offer solutions;
- offer explanations and solutions;
- solve and complete puzzles;
- process information and pick out selected information from a description.

Providing activities for developing language structure and use

The GR practitioner needs to provide activities each day which helps each child to

- relate sounds to letters and words;
- recognise that words are made up of sounds;
- recognise the sounds at the beginning of some words.

Children should also have opportunities to work with words:

- grouping words (e.g. words which rhyme);
- identifying a word, a letter and a space in print;
- working with sentences and communicating ideas using descriptions and action words.

Promoting Mathematics (Numeracy)

Providing activities which enhance number development

Number forms the major part of the Foundation Phase child's mathematical development. The GR practitioner should give active opportunities every day for children to

- count to at least 10 everyday objects reliably.
- say and use number names in familiar contexts.
- know the number names and symbols for 1 to 10.
- order and compare collections of objects using the words 'more', 'less' and 'equal'.
- solve and explain solutions to practical problems that involve equal sharing and grouping with whole numbers of at least 10 and with solutions that include remainders.
- solve verbally-stated additions and subtraction problems with single-digit numbers and with solutions to at least 10.

Providing opportunities to explore patterns, functions and algebra

The child should be able to recognise, describe and represent patterns and relationships, as well as to solve problems using algebraic language and skills. The GR practitioner needs to focus on opportunities for

- describing patterns and relationships through the use of symbolic expressions, graphs and tables; and
- identifying and analysing regularities and change in patterns and relationships that enable learners to make predictions and solve problems
- copying and extending simple patterns using physical objects and drawings (e.g. using colours and shapes).and to create her own patterns

Providing activities which enable the children to measure

Measurement allows us to use appropriate measuring units, instruments and formulae in a variety of contexts. The GR practitioner needs to provide opportunities for the children in her class to

- describe the time of day in terms of day or night.
- order recurring events in own daily life.
- sequence events within one day.
- work concretely comparing and ordering objects using appropriate vocabulary to describe:

- mass (e.g. light, heavy, heavier); capacity (e.g. empty, full, less than, more than); length (e.g. longer, shorter, wider, tall, short) (South Africa 2002c)

Providing activities for exploring space and shape (Geometry)

The child should be able to describe and represent characteristics and relationships between two-dimensional shapes and three-dimensional objects in a variety of orientations and positions. Children need to develop tools to think about and describe their physical environment, so that they can study, manipulate and manage it. The GR practitioner needs to help children to

- recognise, identify and name three-dimensional objects in the classroom and in pictures, including boxes (prisms) and balls (spheres).
- describe, sort and compare physical three dimensional objects according to:
- size; objects that roll and objects that slide.
- build three-dimensional objects using concrete materials (e.g. building blocks).
- recognise symmetry in self and own environment (with focus on front and back).
- describe one three-dimensional object in relation to another (e.g. 'in front of ' or 'behind').
- follow directions (alone and/or as a member of a group or team) to move or place self within the classroom (e.g. 'at the front' or 'at the back')

Providing activities for children to practice data handling

Children should be able to collect, summarise, display and critically analyse data in order to draw conclusions and make predictions, and to interpret and determine chance variation. The GR practitioner needs to therefore provide activities for children to

- collect physical objects (alone and/or as a member of a group or team) in the environment according to stated features (e.g. collects 10 dead flowers).
- sort physical objects according to one attribute (e.g. red shapes);
- draw a picture as a record of collected objects and
- answer questions (e.g. 'Which has the most…?') based on own picture or own sorted objects.

Promoting Life Skills

In GR, the practitioner needs to provide activities which support children's whole development.

Providing opportunities to explore HEALTH

- clean water and eating fresh food;
- personal hygiene; preventing communicable disease;
- safety in the home and at school;
- saying 'no' to abuse

Providing opportunities to develop socially

- basic rights and responsibilities in the classroom;
- the South African flag;
- members of own family, peers and caregivers;
- stories with a moral value from own culture and
- symbols linked to own religion.

Providing opportunities for personal development

- own name and address;
- own body functions and abilities;
- managing emotions without harming self, others or property;
- classroom routine and instructions.

Providing activities for physical development and movement

- running, chasing and dodging games using space safely;
- different ways to move, rotate, elevate and balance;
- expressive movements using different parts of the body;
- free play activities

Providing activities for creating, interpreting and presenting in art forms

- Using play, fantasy and imagination **dance**, through play,
- co-ordinate simple gross and fine motor movements, including crossing the mid-line;
- explore a wide variety of movement words, rhythms and changes in tempo;
- participate in simple dances based on formations and patterns.

- Participate in **drama**
- using voice and movement spontaneously when playing creative drama games;
- in make-believe situations based on imagination, fantasy and life experiences.

- Using **music**,
- sing and move creatively to children's rhymes and music;
- respond in movement to a variety of rhythms and changes in tempo in sounds, songs and stories.

- Freely create images of own world by exploring and experimenting with a wide variety of **art materials**, techniques (including waste materials), and colour in two-dimensional and three-dimensional work in a spontaneous and creative way
- Using tools appropriately e.g. handling of scissors, glue applicators, paintbrush and drawing instruments

Providing opportunities for reflecting, participating and cooperating

- Activities to reflect critically and creatively on artistic and cultural processes, products and styles in past and present contexts.

Providing activities to deal with the economic cycle

- Identifies own personal role in the home as a consumer;
- recognises that advertisements influence personal needs and wants;
- explores and begins to understand the notions of bartering and money and its uses;
- recognises that a household consists of people who must live and work together within a framework of rules (concepts of 'fair' and 'unfair' rules).
- differentiates between play and useful tasks at home;
- relates stories of responsibilities at home;
- recognises the need to do things well and to be committed;

- participates in creative activities that will stimulate entrepreneurial thinking (e.g. drawing, cutting, singing, playing, and talking)

Providing opportunities for scientific investigations

- act confidently on curiosity about natural phenomena; investigate relationships and
- solve problems in scientific, technological and environmental contexts;
- contributes towards planning an investigative activity;
- asks and answers questions about the investigation,
- using 'show and tell 'or stories to say what action is planned;
- participates in planned activity;
- reflects on and talks about what has been done

Providing opportunities for historical and geographical enquiry

- To answer simple questions about stories of the past (answers the question)
- retells stories about the past and draws pictures illustrating these stories (communicates the answer), as well as
- to discuss personal experiences in the past and present and own ages and ages of others (chronology and time), and to
- responds to stories about the past e.g. listens to a story about the past and makes comments (source Interpretation)
- discusses personal experiences of familiar places (people and places

Provide opportunities to apply technological processes and skills ethically and responsibly using appropriate information and communication technologies.

- investigates, designs and makes and evaluates:
- physically manipulates products to explore their shape, size, colour and the materials they are made of
- chooses from a given range, materials or substances that can be used to make simple products
- makes simple products from a range of materials provided.
- expresses own feelings about the products made.

Appendix H (1) Pilot Questions to GR practitioners

1. Do you have any children attending GR less than five years old? If yes please explain why.

2. Are those under-fives in the school enrolment?

3. Any fees paid by GR?

4. Where do you get support for GR. e.g. Social Development or Education Department or NGO?

5. What kind of support you get?

6. Do you have a feeding scheme at your school?

7. What food do children eat? If they have soup what kind of soup?

8. Do they eat daily? If not why? What do you do then?

9. Are there any children who bring their lunch boxes? If yes why?

10. What is the routine of eating meals? Do they sit down while eating or a child decides what he/she wants?

11. How often do children attend GR class?

12. When not attended what are the reasons?

13. Does their absence have anything to do with food?

14. Where do you get indoor and outdoor equipment for GR?

Appendix H (2) Semi-structured Interview Schedule (GR practitioner)

Note that all interviews were semi-structured based on these questions as a guide and all interviews were carried out in isiXhosa. There will therefore be variations in questions and conversations.

A. Focus area: DAP and the practitioner's role in GR

1. What do you understand about children's development and the appropriate practice of this for teaching young children?
2. What do you see as being the role of practitioner in GR?

B. Focus Area: the context of the children in your class

1. What do you see as parents' perceptions and expectations in GR?
2. What factors do you think contribute to the success in young children learning around numeracy, literacy and life skills?
3. What factors do you think constrain children's literacy, numeracy and life skills development?
4. How do you view the environment of the children in your class? Describe their homes and families, what helps the children? What hinders their development?

C. Focus area: child development: approaches and methods of teaching numeracy, literacy and life skills

1. What approaches do you use to the teaching of numeracy, literacy and life skills?
2. What feedback do you have from parents about children's achievements while in GR?
3. How do you make sure that Critical Outcomes are achieved by your children?
4. What are your expected outcomes of GR children by the end of the year?

D. Focus area: children as individuals

1. Given that each child is different, what differences do you notice in their learning and development?
2. How do you deal with this in your own teaching?

E. Focus area: support systems

1. What successes have you experienced as a teacher in your work? Why?
2. What constraints have you experienced as a teacher in your work? Why?

Appendix I Semi-structured Interview Schedule (parents)

Note that all interviews were semi-structured based on these questions as a guide and all interviews were carried out in isiXhosa. There will therefore be variations in questions and conversations.

1. What do you understanding about children's development?
2. How do you practice child rearing in accordance with this?
3. What do you as a parent perceive to be your own child's developmental needs?
4. What do you see as you own role in your child's development?
5. What do you see as GR practitioner' roles in supporting your child's development?
6. Do you think GR is important? Why?
7. What sort of skills /knowledge/values has your child learnt?
8. What part of skills for life do you think should be learnt at school?
9. Are there any things they like to do showing their creativity?
10. Do they enjoy reading? To what extent do children exercise reading and writing at home?

Appendix J Semi-structured Interview Schedule (school leadership)

Note that all interviews were semi-structured based on these questions as a guide and all interviews were carried out in isiXhosa. There will therefore be variations in questions and conversations.

1. How do you see child development and the best practice in teaching to deal with this?
2. What sorts of activities do GR children do (i.e. the curriculum)?
3. How is their school day structured?
4. How do you provide support in GR?
5. Are there classroom visits in support of GR? How?
6. What other kind of support is given?

Appendix K Observation Checklist

Observation check list: what is happening inside and outside the classroom?

Focus area	Comments
Classroom layout	
Classroom neatness	
Furniture arrangement	
Different working areas	
Learning materials	
Reading material	
Writing material	
Puzzles and games	
Maths equipment	
Science equipment	
Outdoor material	
Critical outcomes (NCS)	
Solve problems using critical and creative thinking	
Work freely as a member of a team	
Organize and manage themselves and their activities responsible	
Collect, analyse and critically evaluate information	
Communicate freely	
Use science and technology effectively	
Understand the world as a set of related systems	
Observations based on the NCS (see Appendix G	