

**THE NATURE OF CHILD PARTICIPATION IN RECEPTION YEAR (GRADE R) IN THE
WESTERN CAPE**

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University of KwaZulu-Natal

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DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis is my own work and has not been submitted previously for any degree at any other university.

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this thesis was to explore the nature of child participation in Grade R through focusing on five Grade R teachers and fifteen children (eight girls and seven boys) in three Grade R contexts in the urban area of the Western Cape, South Africa. The importance of this study is noted from the dimension of using early childhood education to address inequities of the past and shape a new citizenry through democratic practices. A qualitative approach was undertaken to study how child participation was understood and enacted by teachers in their practice. The children's voices and actions were also studied to make sense of child participation.

A mix of theoretical ideas from Hart (1997), Lansdown (2004) and Vygotsky (1978) was used to study child participation whilst the ideas of Perry (1970) and Rokeach (1960) were used to study teacher beliefs. The agency view of the child stemming from the sociology of childhood helped with understanding child participation from child initiated learning spaces. Notions of power and voice which emanate from the works of Freire (1970; 1994) and Foucault (1977) helped to understand how participation can be realized through a social justice agenda in Grade R.

In order to produce the data for this study, semi-structured interviews were used to examine teacher beliefs. Observations through videos were used to observe the teachers' practices and the children's voices and actions. The findings of this study show that the nature of child participation is socially constructed and context bound. The tightly controlled curriculum reform environment restricts possibilities for organising Grade R as a space for democratic practices where high levels of child participation take place.

The study showed that teachers' beliefs are complex and that it is important for teachers to interrogate the images they hold of childhood, their training and how they define child participation and engage with categories of difference. These aspects complicate child participation.

In focusing on the teachers' practice, it was evident that child participation was strongly influenced by the outcomes they were trying to achieve. The teachers positioning also affected child participation. Where teachers took strong control over shaping the learning outcomes by focusing on learning as the acquisition of knowledge and skills, children's participation as agents was compromised. In these instances teachers played the roles of tellers, instructors and transmitters of knowledge, skills and values. When they made attempts to create shared understandings, child participation became stronger. When children's voices and actions were examined, they displayed high levels of participation in order to make sense of the Grade R programme and beyond. As agents they were able to assert themselves in different ways to make their agendas matter. The arena of free play allowed the children to make decisions and to make their views and opinions matter. This escaped the teachers' attention as play was seen as a hands-off session on the timetable.

This study fills the gap in literature for understanding the nature of child participation in Grade R as the entry point for formal schooling through South African examples. It shows how the Grade R system and the practices emanating from it goes against the need for democratic practices to shape a new citizenry through the early years. This study has implications for children's learning, pedagogy, leadership and teacher education.

DEDICATION

To my dearest husband, Mahomed Asif and my children, Ahmed and Raeesah. Thank you for your patience. May Allah reward you for being with me during my trials and tribulations.

I would like to thank my Creator for guiding me and providing me with the mental and emotional strength to complete this thesis. I am also grateful for the teachings of our holy Prophet Muhammed (P.B.U. H) who has inspired me with qualities of perseverance, patience, kindness and humility.

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I am truly grateful to the children and teachers who allowed me into their spaces of the Grade R world. This study would have been impossible without their participation. The social actors in this study, the children, provided an elevated level for understanding them as agents of their own lives.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

GR R	Reception Year
FP	Foundation Phase
CAPS	Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement
NCS	National Curriculum Statement
WCED	Western Cape Education Department
NPA	National Programme of Action
ECD	Early Childhood Development

CRC	Children's Rights Committee
UNCRC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
SAIDE	South African Institute of Distance Education

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Opening lines

All people - who in any place have set themselves to study children seriously - have rather ended up by discovering not so much the limits and weaknesses of children but rather their surprising and extraordinary strengths and capabilities linked with an inexhaustible need for expression and realization ... children are autonomously capable of making meaning from their daily life experiences through mental acts involving planning, coordination of ideas and abstraction. Remember, meanings are never static, univocal, or final; they are always generative of other meanings. The central act of adults, therefore, is to activate, especially indirectly, the meaning-making competencies of children as a basis for learning.

(Malaguzzi, 1998, pp. 78-81)

The statement above goes to the heart of this thesis: children are social actors whose nature of participation needs to be understood and engaged with. The ways in which society treats its children is based on images society has of them and how their rights are accorded. In common sense propositions, childhood is divided from adulthood. Adulthood is usually assumed to be the ultimate destination of completeness whilst childhood is seen as a state of incompleteness; therefore the child must travel on a journey in order to reach the ultimate destination of adulthood which is marked by completeness. The term *child* has been used to describe anyone with a low status without regard for their age (Hoyles,

1979; James & Prout, 1997). In this context children are seen as unfinished products that need to be nurtured in order to become competent adults.

Childhood is also described as a golden age where children should be untroubled by adult pressures. The pleasures of the golden age are for children to enjoy the best years of their lives. Childhood is seen as a time of innocence when children must not be troubled with the pressures of adult tasks. Children are thus seen to be dependent on adults. However, the reality of many children's experiences of their childhoods is far removed from the enjoyment of a "golden age". The harsh realities of children's lives both in the school and the home prove that children are powerless and are forced to take on subordinate positions in the family and school (Franklin, 2002).

Childhood cannot be described as a universal experience. It is defined by the social, cultural and historical factors that children experience (Franklin, 2002; James & Prout, 1997). The sociology of childhood identifies childhood as an experience that is unique to the child who is respected as a person in his/her own right. Childhood is a social institution and is shaped by categories of differences such as gender, class, ethnic and historical location. Children as inhabitants of childhood display their uniqueness and strengths which adults must engage with.

The notion of children as active meaning makers and childhood as socially, culturally and historically constructed, means that children need to be understood in the context of the citizenship and priorities that societies set for them. The Italian context of children, described in the opening lines, makes sense in a country that has established systems where young children's development and education are well supported. South Africa is still healing from an apartheid past where equity, access and redress are still high on the transformation agenda. In the sections that follow, it will be evident that preschool education in South Africa was race- based and part of a system of discrimination and oppression (SA Department of Education DOE, 2001a)

Historically, Black¹ children were denied preschool education which had limited government support; instead, the system favoured White children. To this day, racial classification remains a feature of contemporary South Africa. (The apartheid categories namely Indian, Coloured, African and White remain acutely evident in discussions on education. The term Black South Africans or Black is used as a collective for Indians, Coloureds, and Africans. It is also used as a synonym for African. Current academic convention recognizes the use of racial classifications for analytical purposes, acknowledging that such racial classifications were constructed under apartheid law as part of oppressive social practices.)

Under the apartheid system, there were huge disparities in the educational expenditure for Whites as opposed to that for black children (SA Department of Education , 2001b). Socially, the races were geographically separated and people of colour were afforded limited services. Cultural and religious freedom was also curtailed for people of colour. To achieve equity and fairness, the early reconstruction after 1994 began with a focus on all children's rights. This is visible through how a rights agenda has informed the South African national programme of action.

Despite the positive policy developments and implementation of programmes of action, South Africa is still one of the most racially unequal countries in the world. The inequities are noted in the access to early childhood development (ECD) programmes. For example, statistics (SA Statistics South Africa, 2010) reveal that only 43% of children under 5 years of age attended an ECD programme at home, a centre or elsewhere. It is also indicated that children from the poorest households are only half as likely to benefit from ECD programmes as children from the richest households. The lack of access to ECD programmes of necessity impacts on the formal schooling of a large percentage of South Africa's children. Grade R, which is intended to be the first year of

¹ The race categories of African, Coloured, White and Indian people are social constructions. They have their origins in the system of racial classification used under apartheid. In the context of redress measures, these categories continue to feature in existing legislation and policy.

basic schooling for all children by 2014, has seen an increase in enrolment from 15% in 1999 to 60% in 2009 (Statistics South Africa, 2010). However, significant gaps with regard to access and quality still prevail. The picture painted forms an important backdrop for understanding Grade R provision.

Bearing in mind the changes in understanding childhood, the notion of children as social actors and how contexts with inequalities among children shape priorities for them, this thesis examined the nature of children's participation in Grade R classes in the Western Cape. To illuminate the realities of Grade R children's experiences, I present a close focused analysis of the above by focusing on both the children and their teachers. Since teachers create the environment and opportunities for children's participation, I examined their beliefs and practices, especially with regards to teacher directed activities. Moreover, in order to mainstream the argument that children are agentic beings whose meaning making must be engaged with, I show how children use the available opportunities to make the Grade R programme their own.

1.2 My journey as a researcher

My life experiences as a child, wife, mother, teacher and researcher formed an integral part of this study. Many of the accounts of participation that I experienced and did not experience as a child shaped my ideas. My family histories of the ways in which my family members invited participation and participated themselves also influenced my ideas on child participation, especially in education. I reveal some important details of my family history to show how instrumental my family members were in my childhood experiences and to illuminate the influence they had on who I am today. I do believe that my forefathers were powerful custodians of children's rights and that they were also great teachers in their own right.

I was born in the late 1960's in Durban, KwaZulu-Natal into an Indian family of Muslim faith. I was the youngest member of a family of five children. My late dad was born in Barberton, Mpumalanga province. His family, who came from India in the late 1800's, was

the first Indians of the Muslim faith to settle in Barberton. My forefathers were great initiators of education and they also upheld the rights of children to be educated, despite being part of the gruesome apartheid era. Their resilience in times of the adversity of apartheid did not prevent them from empowering Black, Indian and Coloured children who were at the time deprived of their rights to education. Having very little education themselves and not being fluent in English, they did not forego the importance of the right to a good education. In essence, they were rights bearers themselves and encouraged participation.

In 1886, my great grandfather, Mr Mahomed Moosa Vawda, who came from Bodan in Gujerat, India opened up a general dealer business in Barberton. My great grandfather was deeply concerned about the lack of education for Black, Indian and Coloured children. Therefore, in 1922, around the same time that the South African Government through the Bantu Education policy introduced race differentiated curricula in schools, he decided to open the first school for children of colour in Barberton. Considering that there were no teachers available to teach these children, he deliberately sought a teacher from Port Elizabeth. Mr Pillay was brought in to teach the children basic skills such as reading, writing and arithmetic.

Resources were few to none and, additionally, there was no building available in which to teach the children. A huge tent was erected to house the children. All beginners - even children as old as twelve who had not received any prior education - were placed in one class. My great grandfather also saw to the children's nutritional needs as some children had very little to eat at home and came hungry to school on a daily basis.

After three years of supporting, educating and nurturing the children, the then Education Department took over the school from my great grandfather in 1925 and erected pre-fabricated buildings to house the children. The school was registered as the Barberton Indian and Coloured School. After the fruitful attempts of my great grandfather, this was the first school where Indian and Coloured children could be educated in the Barberton area. I am proud to say that he was the first Indian man of Muslim faith to have pioneered

a primary school for children in Barberton, Mpumalanga. I am his proud great grandchild, knowing that his legacy will live on to show us how, despite the constraints faced by apartheid, he ensured that children received a sound education.

My parents were also instrumental in displaying the sound notions of human rights that I cherish to this day. My father, being an ardent cricketer in the late 1960's, became captain of the Victoria United Cricket Club and was the first Indian cricketer to play against Kenya in the late 1950's. Being Indian did not prevent him from participating in cricket during the difficult conditions enforced by the apartheid regime. He was also a keen driver of education and ensured that his children received a sound education. Our rights to a good education were always one of his highest priorities, and early education was one of them.

By the early 1970's a number of nursery schools were established in South Africa. In 1942, an address made by the Nursery School Association of South Africa highlighted the need for more and better nursery schools in the country (Olivier, 1989). My older siblings did not have the opportunity to attend any form of pre-primary school education due to the constraints experienced during the apartheid era. White supremacy led to social engineering which ensured that education for Black, Indian and Coloured children in South Africa was limited. This was done in order to prevent them from progressing into self-sufficient, economically thriving individuals independent characteristic of middle class. Social mobility was curtailed.

Around the early 1970's, I was the first child in my family to attend nursery school, as it was referred to in those days. My older siblings shared the excitement about me being the first child to attend nursery school. I recall memories of my older sister carrying my bag and holding my hand as she led me to the car, uttering words of motivation. I was always the busy body in the house. I have recollections of my mother saying that I needed to go to nursery school in order to be kept busy. Somehow, nursery school in the days of apartheid was perceived as a space within which children should be kept busy; this also gave it a custodial connotation.

In the days of apartheid we did not have a choice of attending more affluent nursery

schools. This forced individuals from the Black, Indian and Coloured communities to open private nursery schools. The so-called nursery school that I attended was situated on the verandah of my Apa's house. (An Apa is a teacher who dominantly teaches Muslim children.) Around the time that I attended nursery school, there were only a limited number of nursery schools which Indian children could attend. Since all the children that attended my nursery school were Muslim, the Apa catered for the children's Islamic and secular education. At nursery school we learnt some nursery rhymes and played for the rest of the day. As children we had little opportunity to learn through exploration or play. Our play activities were developed by ourselves. The Apa was unqualified and used the nursery school as a source of income. It is interesting to note that from 1939 to 1957 only one group of seven teachers were trained to become nursery school teachers.

It is only since 1975 that there has been a demand for Indian nursery school teachers and initially the Nursery Aids Diploma was offered at the Springfield College of Education in Durban, the Transvaal College of Education in Fordsburg, Johannesburg and the M.L. Sultan College in Durban (Olivier, 1989). For many years the Indian community, due to cultural and religious beliefs, had not seen the need for nursery schools.

For the Apa, who took on a custodial role, taking care of us was a priority on her agenda. Ensuring that each child was safe and occupied was important to her. Nurturing our cognitive activities was approached from the perspective of Islamic education. She performed well in educating us on Islamic principles such as learning the surahs and duas (Islamic verses and prayers that are extracted from the Holy Quran).

At nursery school we were never asked for our opinions. Our activities were always determined by Apa, who saw little reason for allowing us to participate in our learning. We rarely got to draw our own pictures and colouring pictures within pre-given frames was the order of the day. We participated according to the Apa's agenda. We were trained to conform to an Islamic way of life. Rote learning and teaching by telling and instructing informed the approach to educating Muslim children.

Upon reflection on my participation in nursery school with an Islamic ethos, I do not feel compromised. I was socialized into Islam as a way of life. I now view the act of rote learning as a connection with God and allegiance to one God. This helps children to remain focused and highly disciplined. My early socialization prepared me to participate in life as a Muslim child. It really did not matter if I wasn't a critical thinker because my frames of reference were created for me.

One way in which I can recall childhood as a time of obedience, discipline and respect was during the month of Ramadan. During Ramadan Muslims abstain from food and drink from sunrise to sunset. During this time children as young as five are beginning to be trained to fast. This may be for only half a day and serves as training for when it is compulsory to begin fasting. I can still recall how my parents would encourage me to fast a full day as opposed to half a day when I was six years of age. I was rewarded for fasting a full day.

After having lost my dad at a young age and not completing my degree, my late mum encouraged me to open a preschool in the garage of our home in the early 1990's. I had no formal teaching qualification at that stage but I intended to pursue my studies in the field of early childhood education. After some advertising we opened with three children and this number increased to five after two weeks. My mum was extremely supportive and although the children's parents paid only for the preschool day, my mum would provide the little ones with drinks and a small snack.

Devastatingly, after only two weeks of opening the school my mum experienced a major heart attack and passed away. I was deeply shocked and moved. She had been my pillar of strength and I found it very difficult to continue with the preschool. My family promised that they would support me in my endeavours and insisted that I keep the preschool open, but I could not see myself continuing as there were too many memories. My aunt, who supported me at the time, took on the role of mother and promised to take me on a pilgrimage to Mecca and Medina. She kept her promise and, together with my uncle and other aunts, we went on this fascinating journey.

On our return I was unemployed and decided to look for a preschool post; I was lucky in securing a temporary one. This experience was exciting as I got to learn a great deal. However, the overall approach that teachers adopted towards children was premised on the traditional idea of children as 'adults in the making'. Teachers positioned themselves as technicians who had to solve problems by rectifying children's learning. In other words, teachers had the correct answers and, therefore, needed to correct children's learning in ways that would prepare them for school. Teachers took on an approach that was geared towards a behaviourist orientation. They saw themselves as good models for children to follow. Whilst I realised that this was important, I felt that the focus on what children were trying to do and achieve was ignored. I guess this can be attributed to the dominant way of thinking about children's education at the time which regarded children as having nothing valuable to contribute to their childhood.

At the beginning of 1996 I decided to open my own preschool. Parents in the neighbourhood were very excited about the reopening and word spread fast. Within the first two weeks of opening I already had fifteen children. It was an exciting time for me as I enjoyed teaching in an early childhood context. However, I was blinded by the approaches to teaching that I had been exposed to in my previous years. I was led to believe that official knowledge of developmental psychology was the only right knowledge from which to view children. The idea of children having rights, especially participation rights, was far from my mind because the previous experiences that I had been exposed to had shaped my thinking into believing that children were empty vessels that needed to be filled with knowledge.

It was my own educational experiences and, in a way, the knowledge that some teachers held about how best to teach children that influenced my beliefs about how children learn and what rights children have or do not have. The approach that I also adopted in my teaching was behaviourist and it favoured transmission modes of teaching. Children had little say as I arranged activities according to an agenda that I saw fit. However, I was conscious of the fact that there was a gap in how I understood childhood and therefore I felt the need to challenge myself further.

With a lot of encouragement from my husband, I decided to register for a Bachelor of Primary Education degree at the University of South Africa. Our modules were also offered from perspectives that favoured the universal child. The emphasis on modules was placed on formality and content prescription to ensure that teachers were well equipped for prescriptive teaching. Within a short period of time I received a degree in Primary Education. I somehow felt that I needed a level of stronger stimulation. I decided to join a primary school and teach in the Foundation Phase. I taught in Grades 1 and 2 for a few years but the teaching approach subscribed to transmissive ways of teaching with strong teacher directedness. The question of children participating in active ways in their education was so limited. Focus on the curriculum was narrow and possibilities for children's autonomy were not adequately explored.

I continued to work in the Foundation Phase for a while and, whilst doing this, I completed my Honours and Master's degrees. As time went on I found myself engaging more with research issues surrounding early childhood. This driving passion led me to join higher education. At the end of 2008 my husband and I went on a pilgrimage and on our return I joined the University of KwaZulu-Natal on a contract basis.

For the first time I had an opportunity to immerse myself deeply into the understandings of early childhood. After long and engaging conversations with my supervisor, I began to look differently at childhood and the way in which children are understood. She introduced me to a fresh lens through which childhood could be understood. This lens emanated from an agency perspective, whereby traditional developmental psychology and western ideas on preschool education were challenged. After fifteen years into a democracy I realized that the time was perfect to begin a doctoral study on child participation in Grade R.

Whilst working at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, a turning point occurred in my life. I was appointed as a lecturer in Literacy at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology in Cape Town. Although I enjoyed lecturing in Literacy, my true passion was grounded in early childhood education, more specifically in Grade R. In 2011 I was extremely fortunate

to receive funding from the National Research Foundation to embark on a doctoral study. This was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity and I made every endeavour to make full use of it. At the same time, the Department of Higher Education, which received funding from the European Union, initiated a programme in all South African higher education institutions to strengthen Foundation Phase teaching. During the project undertaken by my institution, I was positioned as the doctoral student. Upon my return to lecturing duties, I was tasked with lecturing in Grade R and am currently lecturing in this field.

I conclude this section by confirming that the experiences I had exposure to over the years have changed my ideas about what childhood means and how children can participate in their childhood. I shared my personal journey, which shows how my socio-cultural and religious background shaped my experiences. I firmly believe that childhood should be understood as a special time when children should be given the opportunity to participate meaningfully in their life world. I feel that adults responsible for teaching children should value children's voices. From my own experiences, I know that child rearing is a complex task and that giving young children voice might not always be valued.

In the next section I show how children's rights became an active issue both within the South African and international contexts. I reveal this in order to show how the shifts in our political history contributed to both the silencing and activation of children's rights.

1.3 The advent of child participation from a global perspective

In order to understand child participation in early childhood, it is important to consider the historical roots from both national and international perspectives. Internationally, child participation became part of a legal framework through the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1989). The notion of rights originated from an idea of human rights, which traces back to 400 years ago when John Locke in the seventeenth century, and Thomas Paine and Immanuel Kant in the eighteenth century, indicated man's autonomy rights to personal privacy, to own property, and to have freedom with reference made to freedom of thought, freedom of conscience and freedom of religion

(Alderson, 2008). The protection of freedom from interference by other individuals or the State was the original right that was emphasized.

Back in 1924, with the Geneva Declaration of the Rights of the Child adopted by the League of Nations (Alderson, 2008), the question of development was seen as the guiding principle that accorded children their success. From a children's rights perspective, the Geneva Declaration of the Rights of the Child highlights the importance of giving children the opportunity to develop mentally and spiritually in order to be successful. Thirty five years later, in the context of a different world, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of the Child in 1959 also included development amongst its ten principles (Alderson, 2008). Development was seen as important for the young child. Development was viewed from the lens of what the child will still become, rather than participating in the 'here and now' as who he or she currently is – a social actor.

A further 35 years later, the UNCRC (1989) adopted a more comprehensive coverage of children's rights which included prevention, protection, provision and participation (Woodhead, 2005). Children's provision rights include standards of care, health care, the right to be looked after, the right to have an adequate standard of living, the right to education and childcare, the right to cultural life and the arts, and the right to know about the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Children's protection rights include protection from neglect, abuse, violence, cruel and degrading treatment, discrimination, invasion of privacy, exploitation and hazardous work, armed conflict, invasive research and ecological change. Children's participation rights include the right to life and optimal development, the right to a name, identity and family, the right to form and express views, the right to respect of the child's evolving capacities, the right to be heard during procedures, the right to freedom of expression and information, the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, the right to freedom of association and peaceful assembly, the right to respectful mass media, and the right to inclusive communities.

Each of these three kinds of rights involves a child-adult dyad (Alderson, 2008) namely:

the providing adult and the needy child; the protective adult and the victim child; mutual respect between the participating child and adults (Alderson, 2008). There has been a gradual shift in the way that children's rights are being perceived.

In all of these before the introduction of rights for women and children, they were excluded from the idea of having rights. One of the reasons for this is that women were seen as too dependent and irrational to have these rights (Mendus, 1987). The question of dependency, it was argued that women relied and existed purely on male assistance and male authority. It was as though women turned to men for everything, ranging from relief from financial stresses to relief from emotional stresses.

Children were not recognized as worthwhile and were often regarded as innocent (James, Jenks & Prout, 1998) and therefore as unworthy of possessing any rights. The absence of rights for children was rooted in the same factors which excluded attention to women, which was deeply rooted in the past in male dominated ideology which favoured a patriarchal society (Mendus, 1987). This type of male dominated ideology did not recognize women as worthwhile and was linked with an approach known as conservatism. Conservatism is essentially associated with a male orientated structure which refers to males as the 'gatekeepers' of the discipline.

Gradually, international perspectives on the position of children in society realized that a separate convention was needed for children because they were not given the opportunity to voice their opinions in public arenas; children were thus considered to be in need of extra attention and protection. The need for the UNCRC was proposed by the Polish government on the eve of the International Year of the Child in 1979 (Lansdown, 1995). The idea of establishing such a convention was favoured by all members of the United Nations, except the United States. After a decade, a drafting committee produced the Convention which was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1989.

Firstly, the aim of the Convention was to establish a minimum set of rights for children. It was considered to be a radical document that paid attention to children's welfare rights and their rights to protection. Moreover, it also placed emphasis on and acknowledged

children's civil and political rights (Lansdown, 1995). All governments that ratified the Convention are accountable for ensuring that the principles of the Convention are implemented and respected for all children (Nutbrown, 2003). Secondly, each government is responsible for publicizing the Convention and making its provisions known to both adults and children. Finally, all governments that ratified the Convention are required to give a progress report on its implementation, both in policy and practice, after two years and, subsequently, after every five years (Lansdown, 1995; Nutbrown, 2003). The Committee of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child recognized that governments will not always present critical and comprehensive reports on the implementation of children's rights. For this reason nongovernmental organisations (NGO's) were appointed to undertake responsibility for comprehensive report delivery to the UNCRC (1989).

The philosophy that underpins the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child is one that values children as equals to adults. Childhood should not be seen as preparation for adulthood. As such, it is argued that children have the same inherent values as adults (Franklin, 1995). The Convention should not be considered a dry document that outlines rules on how to behave. Indeed, it was designed in such a way that special attention should be accorded to children who should be valued in society. As such the treatment, protection and participation of children are highlighted in this document (Franklin, 1995). It is therefore argued that the Convention seeks to ensure that children be granted full opportunity to enjoy their childhood through their rights.

The Convention seeks to cover human rights for children in the civil, political, social, economic and cultural realms (Woodhead, 2005). Of note for this study is the fact that the Convention places strong emphasis on children's development to becoming responsible citizens, and the fact that their participatory rights need to be respected.

Upon examining the developments that occur globally in terms of children's rights, it raises questions on who children are, and how they should be taken care of and by whom. Another issue that complicates children's rights is the tension between universalism and

particularism. For social accounting across the globe, it is important to have children's rights monitored. However, this is complicated by culture and context which need equal attention.

In the next section I show how South Africa's political history limited the possibilities for child participation to be implemented. I do this in order to map the progression South Africa has attained in relation to children's rights in early childhood education.

1.4 The apartheid era for South Africa's children

South Africa's apartheid regime created a racially divided country that denied Black South Africans their heritage. From the mid 17th to the late 20th centuries, White South Africans thrived on political, military, economic and ideological powers to advantage themselves and to disadvantage indigenous Blacks and turn them into exploited workers (Terreblanche, 2005). By the 1960's, White dominated supremacy was fully entrenched in South Africa and apartheid was the ideology promoting racial discrimination. Apartheid was based on the colonial conviction that Whites were superior to indigenous people and, therefore, white people had the advantage of better standards of living. Apartheid was the ideology which promoted social engineering that made opportunities available for Whites and thus progress towards better education, employment, housing and land was only meant for Whites (Barbarin & Richter, 2001).

For the Black children of South Africa, apartheid had serious implications as many young Black children, together with their parents, lost their lives; and those that did survive were deprived of their rights. Black children were denied access to a decent life, nutrition, housing, health services, education and other basic services (SA Eastern Cape Department of Education (ECDOE), 2008).

However, it was notable through the resilience of Black South African children that they saw the importance of participation when it came to resistance against oppression. South Africa's Black children can be considered as heroes in the struggle against apartheid as

they played a huge role in the fight for liberation (Alberts, 1997). The 1976 Soweto uprising was characterized as being one of the most important historical turning points for Black children of South Africa (SA Presidency: Office on the Rights of the Child, 2008). The following extract from Alberts (1997, p. 58) describes what the effects of the Soweto riots were on the political status of South Africa:

Thomas indicated that he was ready to enter this troubled world shortly after the sun came up on December 14th 1976. Some twelve hours later, he was the latest citizen of South Africa. Six months previously on June 16th six people had died and 20 had been injured following a demonstration by 10 000 Soweto high school pupils. They were protesting against being forced to learn in Afrikaans in the township's schools. That fateful day and the next two days changed the course of history in this country...

During this struggle, many Black South African children were held in custody, maimed, killed, and were denied their capacities to be children (SA Department of Education (DOE), 1998). When Black children participated in the Soweto riots, this form of participation ensured that their voices were strongly heard as they attempted to become liberators of the oppressed under apartheid and contested oppression. However, the challenge of South Africa's Black children to claim their rights was still far from over, as South Africa was built on ideological and political struggles which impacted strongly on children.

Apartheid divided South Africa into Black ethnic homelands and independent states and Black children were considered to be citizens of these creations, which mainly fell under the Ciskei and Transkei (Bray & Dawes, 2007). The establishment of laws and policies

during the apartheid era was designed in a way to intensify the state's control of the Black population so as to deny them access to the opportunities that the White population enjoyed. These laws impacted greatly on the lives of Black children. The apartheid regime created high and rising levels of poverty and unemployment, together with inequalities in the distribution of power, property and opportunities for Blacks. These conditions were also coupled with violence, criminality and ill health amongst the poor (Terreblanche, 2005). In addition, situations and opportunities for Black children were determined by their racial classification (Wilson & Ramphela, 1989). Alberts (1997, p. 61) quotes Desmond Tutu, who recalls:

The draconian apartheid laws entrenched the divisions in South African society. A shadow fell across our lives. We were poor but we could still be whole people - apartheid made you feel something less than that. Apartheid begged the question "Why?" and [made you] different, so untouchable, that you could not queue in the same lines as white people, travel on the same buses, or sit in the same carriages on the train, use the same taxis or park benches...

In 1949, when the National Party came into power, it was threatened by the fear of racial swamping and mixing. So, in view of this, they made attempts to paralyze Black mobility and advancement (Terreblanche, 2005). The Pass laws, the Group Areas Act (Act No 41, 1950) and the Migrant Labour System, amongst other laws and policies, ensured that there would be attempts for a racially and territorially segregated South Africa (SA Eastern Cape Department of Education (ECDOE), 2008). These laws ensured that members of families were separated from one another.

Separate states, known as homelands, were created on undeveloped land and women, children and elderly people were forced to move to these areas which had no proper housing, no access to electricity and no clean running water (Alberts, 1997). This forced move resulted in thousands of children, women and men losing their South African

citizenship and the few rights that they possessed. This racial and territorial segregation was a deliberate, huge attempt to address Black swamping.

The Group Areas Act of 1950 severely affected the Indian and Coloured population groups as well. Whites were considered to be a priority and the best pieces of land were reserved for them. Blacks, Indians and Coloureds were forced to move to areas that were less elite and posed health hazards. For example, in Durban some Indians were forced to move to Merebank, which is situated close to an oil refinery, as it was a suburb that was designated for Indians and Coloureds. The health hazards of this move still impact on the residents of this suburb with some residents suffering from wheezing, asthma and cancer. As a result of the Group Areas Act, many Black children were forced to move to the homelands and, as a result, had to walk long distances to schools in order to get access to a sound education, which in most cases for Black children was not a reality. Alberts (1997, p. 64) quotes Desmond Tutu, who recalls how the Group Areas Act affected his family:

*In 1955 nearby Sophiatown was demolished.
It was considered a 'black spot', too close to
a white suburb and therefore it had to go,
making way for white houses.
On a wet February morning the removals began.
Families were loaded, trucks surrounded by their
pathetic belongings and taken to Meadowlands,
a new location far from their places of work, where
people had no land tenure. Sophiatown was
bulldozed and reduced to rubble. Houses, land
that people actually owned were taken away
from those owners without consultation, without
compensation and compassion.
And the name Sophiatown - to rub salt into
the wound of the thriving, throbbing community of*

Sophiatown - the authorities renamed it Triomf, which means 'triumph'.

These laws had serious negative impacts on Black families and their children, as they resulted in separation of parents from their children. Not only did these laws create separation between family members, but they also contributed to children not having all the resources available to them to participate in an education. For example, in most cases children were not allowed to live with their mothers if their mothers were domestic workers. Black women who were domestic workers were forced to contribute to the family's income while earning only minimum wages that reduced them to living under the bread line. Alberts (1997, p. 65) quotes Johnny Mmeiwa Dhlabu, who recalls the terrible experience of his mother who worked as a domestic worker:

*We asked our parents to
give us some money to
pay our school fees and
to buy what we needed
for our education. With a
mother who was a
cleaner for the baas in
town and who was barely
making ends meet, this
was not possible. My
mother lived at her
workplace and came
home once or twice a
month.*

Many black women and children were financially dependent on their fathers and husbands who worked in the urban areas and lived in unsuitable living conditions. These men lived in foul single sex hostels that were unfit for human habitation and also lacked adequate

services. Blacks were seen as a main source of labour for Whites in our country (Alberts, 1997).

One of the major contributory factors that led to segregation in the apartheid era was the inception of separate education systems for the different population groups (Terreblanche, 2005). Bantu education, which was designed to be inferior, ensured that a large percentage of Blacks remain uneducated without adequate literacy, qualifications and skills to secure better employment and thus acquire a decent income for themselves and their families. This situation influenced negative outcomes for the children of these families as they had poor health, lower education levels and fewer opportunities that they could enjoy in life. Hadland (2005, p. 98) quotes Miriam Makeba who recalls the education she received as a child:

*Education is considered 'bad' for us,
or at best unnecessary. The natives
have been assigned the roles of
servants to our colonial masters. We
are not taught geometry because we
will not get a chance to use it. We are
not taught geology. The less we are
taught about the outside world, the
better. We are to live in isolation.*

Although the apartheid era is over for South Africa, its effects are still felt today. Although one would have imagined that children who were born post 1994 would have equal rights, the apartheid regime continues to affect children's economic and social rights. I would argue that the effects of apartheid still filter through as they affect children's participation rights, and this will feature in later chapters.

Since one of the concepts that were explored in this study was child participation, it is

important to note how historically, internationally and nationally the birth of rights came to the fore. In the previous sections I have shown how children's rights became an issue internationally, and I also showed how the negative effects of apartheid affected the opportunities afforded to children in South Africa. In the next section I indicate the role that South Africa played in adopting the Convention, thereby affirming rights for her children.

1.5 South Africa's active role in proclaiming the rights of the child

In the 1970's there was an increased awareness of children's rights in South Africa. This awareness grew when the apartheid's state regime's war on the rising political activism amongst children emerged in the 1970's. This led to a strong child's rights movement in South Africa. The child's rights movement became active in the 1980's within South Africa's political apartheid status of the time. This active involvement of child's rights became rife both in and outside South Africa. In 1987, a conference held in Harare, Zimbabwe under the theme: Children, Repression and the Law in Apartheid South Africa, motivated NGO's and participants from the liberation movement to enlighten the world on the plight of South Africa's children by exposing the abuse and repression of the children in our country (SA Presidency: Office on the Rights of the Child, 2012).

A children's rights agenda was formulated by the delegates, which led to the formation of the National Committee on the Rights of the Child (NCRC) in 1990. In 1992 an NGO working with children organised the International Summit on the Rights of Children. At this conference the children drew up the first Children's Charter of South Africa which reflected the voices of children and a plea to be respected and consulted on issues affecting them and their future.

The first situation analysis on women and children was launched in South Africa a year later, which focused on the challenges that women and children faced. This report was discussed at the State of the African Child: An Agenda for Action conference held in

Thembisa, where the proposal for the formation of the National Plan of Action for Children (NPA) was launched (SA Presidency: Office on the Rights of the Child, 2012).

The new democratic South African government adopted a framework for the comprehensive National Plan of Action for Children (NPA) after the 1994 elections. The principles of the NCRC and the Constitution were utilized as a basis for outlining the quality of life; these principles also highlight children's right to equal access to state resources, which confirms the responsibility of government and civil society to be both responsible and accountable for the implementation of these rights (Jacobs, Shung-King, & Smith, 2005).

Children's rights (with a focus on child participation) have been prioritised. For example, the South African Children's Act 38 of 2005 (Department of Social Development, 2006) (under review at the time of the study) makes salient the importance of child participation in different child welfare circumstances. The Act explicitly states that every child that is of a particular age, maturity and stage of development must participate in any matter concerning them and their views must be given due consideration. Although the SA Children's Act 38 of 2005 takes child participation seriously, the Act relates largely to social development and the regulation of early childhood development centres. This study was about the nuances of child participation in early education and not social policy. A full discussion of the Act is therefore beyond the scope of this study.

NPA is the vehicle for driving all national and provincial government and NGO policies, and plans to ensure and promote the well being of children by placing them at the forefront of all activities. The NPA outlines seven areas of priority in its plan of action. These areas are: nutrition, child and maternal health, education, infrastructure, peace and non-violence, leisure and recreation, and special protection measures (SA Presidency: Office on the Rights of the Child, 2008). The NPA serves as the country's reporting policy to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, which South Africa ratified in 1995 (SA Presidency: Office on the Rights of the Child, 2012).

Currently, in South Africa children live in a society that is protected by the Constitution (SA Presidency: Office on the Rights of the Child, 2012) which has the highest respect for children's rights, ensuring children's equal access to all opportunities and promoting the goodwill of all children. During the drafting of the Constitution, the National Committee on the Rights of the Child (NCRC) played a pivotal role in ensuring that children's rights were highly prioritized within the Constitution. The Constitution is the primary legislative framework for children's rights delivery in South Africa. The Bill of Rights, which forms part of South Africa's Constitution, protects human rights for both adults and children. Equality is the first right stipulated in the Constitution, which ensures full and equal enjoyment of rights and freedom and guards against unfair discrimination on grounds of race, gender, religion, disability, language and age (SA Presidency: Office on the Rights of the child, 2012).

The South African government submitted the required initial Report to the UNCRC in November 1997. In keeping with Article 45 of the Children's Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), South Africa was required to submit a supplementary report on the CRC to the United Nations. A total of 250 community organisations and non-governmental organisations agreed unanimously that this sector would produce a supplementary report to the United Nation's Convention on the Rights of the Child, which was facilitated by the National Children's Rights Committee (NCRC). South Africa's civil society, which comprised of national and provincial representatives, participated in the process of compiling the report with the support of the National Children's Rights Committee (NCRC). Focus was placed on what achievements had been made towards the national constitution, legislation and national policy since the new dispensation had come into effect. The shortcomings of this report were evident, however, as it did not reflect on the current implementation of children's rights in South Africa. It could be argued that South African society may have overlooked the importance of social change regarding the survival, protection and development of children in Black communities and, more especially, in African communities.

The UNCRC (1989), the South African Constitution (1996), the Organisation for African Unity (OAU), Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, the National Programme of Action for children in South Africa as well as legislation and national policies were adopted as tools to create an environment that would promote the delivery of rights for children in South Africa (SA Presidency: Office on the Rights of the Child, 2012). In terms of treaty obligations under the UNCRC (1989) and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, South Africa has to report on the country's implementation of these treaties. This serves as an important monitoring function by the treaty bodies and for South Africa to measure its gaps and successes in realising children's rights. According to the UNCRC (1989), every government that ratified the Convention has to provide a report every two years, and subsequently every five years, to the United Nations Committee.

However, although South Africa ratified the UNCRC in 1995 (SA Presidency: Office on the Rights of the Child, 2012), it has thus far reported only once to the Committee of the United Nations, thus not complying with the dates for submission of two subsequent reports. The second, third and fourth combined periodic state report was submitted in October 2012 by the Department of Women, Children and People with Disabilities. The report (SA Presidency: Office on the Rights of the Child, 2012) covers the measures that South Africa has undertaken between 1998 and 2012 to ensure that children's rights are fulfilled in line with obligations as determined by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Through this report (SA Presidency: Office on the Rights of the Child, 2012) the Department of Women, Children and People with Disabilities ensures that the government wide Monitoring and Evaluation Framework and the National Plan of Action for Children, as well as a national set of child rights and well being indicators, promote the mainstreaming of children's rights in all its policies and programmes. Much emphasis is placed on investment in health, education, reduction of poverty and protection of vulnerable children. In viewing how the Department of Women, Children and People with Disabilities has responded in its obligations to article 12 of the United Nations Convention

on the Rights of the Child, it clearly stipulates that there is a need for children to be given more opportunities in expressing themselves within the family, schools, social institutions and care and judicial systems. It further highlights that there needs to be strong public awareness of the participatory rights of children. There is also a need for teachers to be trained in order to enable students to express their views, both at provincial and local level. The Department has responded to the request that children should be able to express their views both verbally and in writing by the time they exit school, and therefore the onus is upon language teachers to be trained in this regard. Valuing the rights of children is of great importance; however, emphasis is placed on children acquiring the ability to express their views by the time they leave school, thus giving attention to older children. This should not be the case, as it is through early childhood education that children as young as five should be given the opportunity to express their views, both verbally and non-verbally.

Although the Constitution has made great strides in realizing children's rights and offers the potential for positive change, children's rights, especially their rights to participation, continue to be estranged (Moses, 2006). More specifically, participation in Grade R still remains a challenge. Teachers of early childhood education need to be trained on how to invite and implement participation if we are to ensure a democratic society. In the next section I trace the historical routes that shaped early childhood education in South Africa.

1.6 The development of preschool education in South Africa

During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, South Africa was mainly involved in agriculture. Within the second half of the nineteenth century after gold and diamonds had been discovered in South Africa, industrialization and urbanization followed, which resulted in South Africa becoming a mining and industrial region (Olivier, 1989). This change in South Africa's economy brought about change in the social and educational arenas as well, which created a need for preschools to be established.

During the first half of the nineteenth century the first preschool, which was termed an

infant school, was established in South Africa by Dr Philip. After the Napoleonic wars in 1814, the Buchanan brothers were instrumental in setting up the first preschool for the children of slaves in the Cape (Olivier, 1989). In 1833 a section was added to this preschool for White children. Thereafter, there was widespread establishment of preschools in the then Natal and Cape colonies. During this time the British government funded these schools on an annual basis. Before the Great Trek by Boers took place in 1838, preschool education was delivered through the medium of English and, although education legislation was later passed in the two Boer Republics of Transvaal and the Orange Free State, preschool education was not prioritized and did not form part of legislation. During the Anglo Boer War of 1899-1902, Britain exported the concept of Free Kindergarten which was the dominant teaching concept in England and which was considered as an organized preschool education. This concept of preschool education was brought to the Transvaal and the Orange Free State. Teachers who were qualified and came from England taught young Afrikaner children in English as part of the Anglicizing policy. Afrikaners did not welcome the Kindergarten concept of preschool education and found it to be a 'nationally unfamiliar institution' (Olivier, 1989).

Fresh ideas regarding preschool education emanating from England reached the shores of South Africa after 1902. The ideas of Froebel, which were based on an informal approach, were found suitable and provisions for preschool education were made through legislation, culminating in the 1910 Education Law of the Orange Free State. Financial constraints resulted in preschool education being eradicated from the official education programme of the province (Olivier, 1989). Thus the government of the Union of South Africa, through the Financial Relation Law of 1921, did not cater for subsidies for learners under seven years of age, and all infant education had to be catered for on a private basis in all the provinces.

Due to the poor socioeconomic conditions during the depression era in South Africa, many children were in need of health care. There was much emphasis placed on health initiatives such as curbing illness and addressing malnutrition and thus municipal welfare

clinics were established to address these needs among children (Olivier, 1989). This means that as far as young children were concerned, there was an initial emphasis on protective care (SA Department of Education (Department of Education, 2001a). After the need for health classes had been identified, the establishment of nursery schools in most provinces emerged. In 1936 the City Council of Johannesburg appointed a special committee to investigate nursery school education. Between 1931 and 1941 many preschools started to mushroom in most provinces of South Africa. The Union Department of Social Welfare provided a per capita subsidy for day care centers in 1940, whilst provincial departments were responsible for supporting nursery schools. The Nursery School Association of South Africa was inaugurated in 1939; this was a body that comprised of White nursery school teachers (Department of Education, 2001a). This was to become the most influential association that focused on the education of young children in South Africa. In 1974 the name changed to the SA Association for Early Childhood Education.

After the Nursery School Association had been established, it made attempts to ensure that if preschools wanted to be subsidised, they had to meet certain standards. Nursery schools were awarded certificates on the grounds of competent service. For example, an A certificate was awarded to a school which provided a meal at midday and which had trained personnel who maintained high standards. A B certificate was awarded to a school that had high standards and trained personnel but did not offer a midday meal, whilst a C certificate was awarded to a school which did not meet the standards and did not have trained personnel. These schools could reapply for re-inspection once the rules were complied with (Olivier, 1989). A recommendation was made by the Committee of Heads of Education Departments in 1940 for all nursery schools to be recognised as an adjunct of the national system of education. Differentiation was made between nursery schools and crèches, where nursery schools were seen as comprising of an educational component whilst crèches were seen as comprising of a custodial component (SA Department of Education, 2001a). Although there were welfare subsidies available for all groups, African nursery schools were not eligible for subsidies. Preschools had to rely more heavily on fee income as the running costs of preschools were very high and the subsidies received from

the State did not meet running costs. Due to this, nursery schools that had trained nursery school teachers became advantaged contexts that catered for privileged middle class children, and African children were subjected to custodial care. Because of the racial inequities that prevailed in South Africa, Whites were in an advantageous position as they held better paid employment and therefore could afford escalating fees at the preschools which their children attended. The advantaged White schools could therefore continuously upgrade their schools by making improvements, whilst other race groups suffered the poor conditions that prevailed at preschools.

Just as much as there were racial inequities that spread like disease in every sphere of life throughout South Africa, there were also racial inequities in the ways in which preschool teachers were trained in the country during the apartheid era (SA Department of Education, 2001a). Most training was provided by NGO's. During 1910, due to the separate jurisdiction over education, the responsibility of education was placed in the hands of central government while the provincial government was responsible for the establishment and maintenance of nursery schools. Whilst Whites had the privilege of being trained at colleges of education by 1938, it was only by 1946 that Blacks received their first training at the Ekutuleni Nursery School in Sophiatown Johannesburg (SA Department of Education (DOE), 2001a). In the next section I show how early childhood education came to be realized within the South African context.

1.7 The vision of early childhood development in South Africa

The vestiges of apartheid impacted greatly on the well being of the lives of young children in South Africa. A racially divided South Africa ensured that Black South African children suffered the effects of poverty, suffered from HIV/Aids and had little or no access to a decent education. The end of apartheid brought new possibilities for South Africa's children. During 1980 and 1981 the De Lange Commission was tasked to inform decisions relating to basic education. There was emphasis in the report pertaining to the importance of pre-primary education to combat the high failure rate amongst Black children in the Junior Primary phase and early school leaving (Short, 1984). A recommendation was made

for a one or two year bridging period to be implemented for school readiness. The new democracy sought ways in which childhood deprivation could be healed of its inhumane past. One area of childhood that was in dire need of prioritization was early childhood development. Early childhood development (ECD) is an umbrella term that encompasses provision of services of care and education for young children aged 0-9 years of age (SA Department of Education (DOE), 2001b). Early childhood development is currently seen as an umbrella term that is accorded to children's space in which they can thrive physically, mentally, emotionally, morally and socially. During this phase high regard is placed on children as individuals.

Previously, focus was placed on the care of children and thus the term 'educare' was referred to as the care and 'watching over' of young children. Currently, ECD focuses on the educational and social nurturing of young children (SA Department of Education, 2001b). Therefore the idea of 'educare' was replaced with the idea of children being placed in stimulating environments where they are exposed to educational stimuli and where they receive care in a holistic way. In order to ensure high quality early childhood services in democratic South Africa, the government invested in National policies to ensure that unjust practices that were characteristic of the apartheid past would be eradicated through the implementation of National policies that would place all of South Africa's children in an educationally, economically and socially advantageous position. High on the agenda was the implementation of high quality early childhood services. The need and value of early childhood education was strongly implemented through various policies relating to early childhood development.

An analysis undertaken by the World Bank revealed that investments in the early stages of an individual's life are contributory to human capital (Barbarin & Richter, 2001). Quality early childhood programs that support children well prove that children succeed in every area of their lives. In addition, Young (2001) states that investment in early childhood development not only advances human capital formation, but also positive social behaviour which reduces social welfare costs and promotes community development.

Policies such as the Nationwide ECD Audit (SA Department of Education, 2001a), the National Pilot Project (SA Department of Education, 1998) and White Paper 5 (SA Department of Education, 2001b) were some of the initiatives that were designed to address high quality delivery and access to early childhood services and the universalization of Grade R.

The Nationwide Audit of ECD Provisioning in South Africa in 2001, which was compiled by the Department of Education and the European Union Technical Support Project, drew up an audit to inform policy and planning initiatives for early childhood development. The Nationwide Audit was seen as a breakthrough document as it was the first time in South Africa that such a document provided data on the provisioning and extent of services and resources. The Nationwide Audit was used as a tool to address a transformative approach that boasts of democracy in early childhood education in South Africa.

However, the Nationwide Audit revealed that South Africa was deeply immersed in racial inequalities within early childhood provisioning (SA Department of Education (DOE), 2001a). Bearing this in mind, there were great disparities between the support given to African children in early childhood contexts and the support that was given to White children. During the apartheid regime, the level of support given to children in African early childhood contexts in terms of infrastructure, general support, programme and educator support was at a bare minimum in comparison to support given to early childhood contexts in which White children were placed. Whilst White children had access to advantageous early childhood sites and provisioning which would prepare them for optimal learning, Black children were exposed to sites and provisioning that placed them in disadvantaged positions (SA Department of Education, 2001a). Thus learning opportunities for Black children remained at minimal standards.

Access to quality early childhood education for Black children during the apartheid era was at risk, leaving them at the margins in attempting to pursue an education that would prepare them as valuable contributors to society. Children in South Africa are also faced

with high mortality potential; the highest mortality rate was found amongst Black children in rural areas. The mortality rates in rural areas could have resulted from increasing poverty levels amongst Blacks in South Africa. The HIV pandemic was found to be another grueling factor that affected young children of our country, resulting in HIV mother-to-child infection that left many children orphaned.

The reality is that apartheid has evidently affected the lives of children in South Africa and our children continue to bear the brunt of this vicious system. However, early childhood development is seen as the hope for our children as it can play a role in redressing past injustices, and is seen as a vehicle for a transformation agenda.

The reconstruction of early childhood development in South Africa has resulted in a closer intervention of policies and implementation strategies. Great strides are being taken in order to ensure that early childhood education is transformed through National policies. The White Paper on Education and Training (SA Department of Education (DOE), 1995) recommends an interdepartmental relationship among the Departments of Education, Health, Social Development and Labour. The primary role of these departments is to assist the ECD directorate to develop a framework for policies for ECD. The National Programme of Action for Children (NPA), which is located within the office of the President, is instrumental in developing a framework for ECD as it is involved in aligning children's rights to provisioning. The Department of Education (known as the Department of Basic Education since 2009) and the Department of Health and Social Development are all jointly involved in ensuring that ECD provisioning is consistent across the country (SA Department of Education (DOE), 1995). Many national policies and programmes exist. These have been developed by different departments that address different issues in early childhood development such as the welfare of children, disability, primary health care, protection of children from abuse, as well as subsidization of childcare worker training through the Manpower Training Act. In the next section I show how the advent of Grade R policies influenced the educational landscape in South Africa.

1.7.1 Policies that speak to Grade R in South Africa

After the democratic elections of 1994 South Africa, in its efforts to revive education opportunities for all children who had been disadvantaged in the apartheid era, cast its beam on early childhood education as a key area of focus. Research into poor learner performance at schools revealed that there was a need to improve the quality of early preparation for learning in South Africa (Reddy, 2007; Howie, 2003; Van der Berg & Louw, 2006).

A study by Pretorius and Naude (2002) found that Black South African children between the ages of five and a half and seven years had low literacy levels and poor fine motor development together with poor visual analysis and synthesis skills. This brought into focus an important area of ECD, namely Grade R, thus highlighting the priority to improve early preparation for learning. Grade R is considered to be an important year as it forms the first grade of the Foundation Phase and is considered to be a preparatory year for Grade 1. Amongst other things this draws attention to the fact that Grade R is a critical space for shaping young children's participatory rights and other aspects of citizenship.

In 1995 the South African government saw early childhood development as an important starting point for human development,. The White Paper (1995) proposed that Grade R becomes compulsory. This development led to Grade R becoming universally accessible but not compulsory. White Paper 5 was one such tool that was designed to ensure that national steps were taken in order to prioritize quality Grade R delivery and access in the country. The drafting of White Paper 5 (SA Department of Education, 2001b) was born out of the findings from the Nationwide Audit of ECD and the National Pilot Project on ECD. As a commitment to meet children's rights, White Paper 5 addresses the promotion of early childhood development, with a key focus on the establishment of Grade R.

The main priority of White Paper 5 (Department of Education (DOE), 2001b) was to ensure that all children aged 5 turning 6 attended an accredited Grade R programme by the year 2010, thus universalizing Grade R. White Paper 5 was designed to create an equal opportunity for children to have access to a universal Grade R in the hope of addressing

the poor levels of education in South Africa that contributed to high drop-out and failure rates of learners at school.

Strong emphasis is placed on Grade R provisioning that is equitable and where quality teaching and delivery of the Grade R curriculum are of vital importance. In addressing the issue of quality, teachers' qualifications to teach Grade R are of prime importance and steps are taken to ensure that all teachers who teach in Grade R are qualified.

In creating new opportunities for young children, White Paper 5 addresses the need to ensure that all children grow up with dignity and equality in South Africa. Early childhood is a perfect initiation period within which children can thrive to their full potential in their quest towards human development. Growing evidence reveals that children require an early, positive start to life that will give them the opportunity to both protect and exercise their rights. The early years are seen as critical to the development of a child's overall intelligence, and the experiences that a child is exposed to within this period are of paramount importance.

Strengthening ECD in South Africa is invaluable and the benefits of a quality ECD does not only apply to children, but to all members of our society. White Paper 5 addresses quality ECD provisioning as vital to improving the basic concepts, skills and attitudes that are required for successful learning and therefore cannot be left to chance as this would reduce the rate of success. It is also argued that the quality of ECD provisioning can lead to economic advantages such as increased productivity during a lifetime, and children who receive quality ECD provisioning can secure a better standard of living for themselves and their families. Social and gender disparities can be addressed in the earlier years of development, which emphasizes the reality that children from poor urban and rural areas are in need of ECD services.

In South Africa there are currently three models of Grade R provisioning. Reception year programmes are offered in public primary schools, in community based sites, and independent schools. The Department of Basic Education oversees access to sites. Funding through grants is made available to ensure that the most affected children, such as poverty

stricken children and children affected by HIV/Aids, will also have access to public Grade R programmes. National Policy Norms and Standards guide the provision of Reception Year programmes.

1.7.2 Grade R in the current context

Although the government had taken great strides to ensure that Grade R became universalized in South Africa by 2010, there were many challenges related to the implementation. Not least of these were the concerns of quality. This led to the target date of 2010 being extended to 2014.

In order to identify the stumbling blocks to implementation, a research project was carried out by the South African Institute for Distance Education (SAIDE) in 2011. This revealed some of the challenges faced in Grade R. The challenges were noted as: appropriate qualifications of teachers to teach in Grade R, the quality of teaching, the lack of understanding of appropriate pedagogy, lack of support for and monitoring of Grade R teachers, and lack of appropriate resources.

Teachers play an important role in driving quality teaching and learning (Todd & Mason, 2005; Christie, 2008). Recent research into the qualifications of Grade R teachers has revealed that many Grade R teachers are under-qualified and, in addition, there is a lack of status of teaching in Grade R (Eastern Cape Department of Education, 2008; South African Institute for Distance Education, 2010; Wits School of Education, 2009). The opportunities for Grade R teachers to update their qualifications are also limited. There is also a lack of support for Grade R teachers from management teams at schools and from department officials (WSoE, 2009).

The pedagogic approach to Grade R is important to consider in the light of the following: poorly qualified teachers, need for democratic practice and the dominant idea of the preschool year as a school readiness year. Currently, Grade R is experiencing a push down curriculum from the formal grades in the Foundation Phase. It is not surprising that it is

described as a watered down grade one (Excell & Linnington 2011). This means that explicit instruction is on the rise and play is associated with break time. The pedagogies consistent with this approach borders on teacher directed activities and fewer opportunities for child initiated practices where high levels of child participation can occur.

All the above have implications for the goal of developing an equalising agenda through participatory practice in the Grade R classroom. At the outset, democracy needs to be an organising framework which informs pedagogy. Formosinho and Araujo (2011) from Portugal show how pedagogy can emerge through using democracy as a foundation with a push up intervention for early care and education of children from birth to age 3. They note that "pedagogy in participation" (Formosinho & Araujo, 2011, p. 231) that is premised on democratic principles can be effective in addressing the central educational aims and the daily experiences of all actors, including the children. A systemic and holistic pedagogic approach is favoured.

For the above to happen in the South African context, Grade R should be conceptualised taking into account pedagogy with children from birth onwards, instead of a push down effect from the more formal years of the Foundation Phase. Based on the evidence in this study, a strong case is made for more affirming perspectives of child participation (see Chapters 5 and 7).

Another issue of concern is the image of children that informs Grade R practice. The developmental view of children has dominated images of how children develop and learn. The notion of ages and stages proposed by Piaget (1960) values the child as 'becoming' and thus focuses on the universal child. Children are considered to be marginalized 'becomings' who must acquire certain skills in order to become competent adults (James, Jenks & Prout, 1998). The child is valued for who he will become rather than for who he is now as a being.

The child as an adult-in-the-making was the grounding image of children in the National Curriculum Statement (NCS) (SA Department of Education, 2007), which was the curriculum at the time of the study. This image (see Chapter 2 for more details) dealt with children as people that were lacking in capabilities and rationality. The skills and school readiness focus of the NCS used a standardised structure for teaching and learning. Previously there had been an absence of a standardised curriculum for the preschool year. Preschool education had been guided by developmental outcomes without a solid focus on numeracy and literacy. The NCS then introduced three subjects in Grade R, namely literacy, numeracy and lifeskills. This subject- oriented way of approaching teaching and learning in Grade R was a shift for many teachers and was thus interpreted in different ways. Learning outcomes and assessment standards were given to the teachers. They had to use themes in order to develop programmes in focused and integrated ways.

Where subject divisions are prevalent it is highly likely that an instrumental approach, which is instructivist in nature, will take place (Anning, 1991). Children complete worksheets and do activities where there are limited opportunities for exploration and inquiry (Anning, 1991; Gordon & Browne, 2008). Pedagogy-in-participation which takes its cues from educating young children (described earlier on) is compromised when a narrow instructivist approach is in action. Although the NCS encouraged opportunities for child participation which were consistent with child-centred opportunities, the take up would have depended on teachers' qualifications, experiences and motivation. As a case in point, this study revealed how a tightly controlled, structured approach to learning made teachers in Grade R become mere transmitters of knowledge.

The nature of child participation is intimately tied up with treating children in a socially just way. This is one of the principles of the NCS. Currently there are differential levels of quality education which operate through the working of two education systems: one is a well-resourced system which serves 25% of the population and which performs adequately to well, and the other is a poorly resourced low performing system which serves 75% of the population. This latter system is made up of Black and poor students

who are continuously failed by their schooling and who achieve poor outcomes (Hoadley, 2013).

One of the critical interventions to improve performance would be the way in which teachers engage with children. Teachers need to be committed to pedagogies that open up spaces for high levels of child participation. To do this, teachers need to work in a system that is organised for democracy. What was surfacing at the time of the study was a rigid system which forced teachers to take up positions that made them experts and the children novices. Whilst it is argued that in the context of poorly qualified teachers heavy scaffolding is needed, it is also necessary to be aware of the compromises that happen in a system geared towards performance and accountability and the overuse of a transmissive pedagogy.

1.8 Gaps in research

Taking into account what has been said thus far and the need for transformation that addresses early childhood education as an equaliser in the South African context, I note the following gaps that directed my research:

- The nature of child participation in Grade R has not been researched in a close-focused way in South Africa. This is particularly important taking into account that Grade R has now been included into basic education and is heading toward universal access. Additionally, there is a need to gain an understanding of child participation at entry level of school, especially since we are concerned with shaping a new citizenry, redressing the inequalities of the past, and organising schooling as a space for democratic practice. This study therefore attempted to gain an in-depth understanding of how children participate in a Grade R context. This was done by paying attention to images of children, pedagogic approaches and a curriculum reform agenda with regard to making child participation from an agentic perspective more visible.
- How children participate in their educational settings is very closely related to who

their teachers are and how they create opportunities for sound experiences. An examination of teacher beliefs and the synergies they create within and away from their teaching practice is therefore important. A deeper understanding of the content of teachers' beliefs is required. Hence, this study examined teacher beliefs in an attempt to make meaning of the complex ideas related to child participation.

- The enactment of child participation in nuanced ways needs to be understood to help teachers to recognise how they teach and what this means for child participation. To date, this aspect has not been adequately interrogated. In this study I present a snapshot of teacher directed teaching to show how participation of children are both enabled and constrained.
- There is an increasing need to understand how children participate in educational opportunities in schools. Their agency, power, actions and voice need to be highlighted. This study explored the voices and actions of children to show the potential they have to participate in issues that concern them. In sharing the findings of the study, the aim is to invite teachers to embrace the opportunities that the children present for a more inclusive Grade R education. This dimension is important if we are to understand young children as citizens and how Grade R education can be organised as a democratic space.

1.9 Research questions and objectives

The main research question that guided this study was as follows:

- What is the nature of child participation in Grade R?

The sub-questions were as follows:

- What do teacher beliefs suggest about child participation in Grade R?
- How does teacher directed practice shape the nature of child participation?
- What do the voices and actions of children suggest about the ways in which they

participate in Grade R?

The objectives of this study were as follows:

- To establish what teacher beliefs suggest about child participation in Grade R.
- To examine teacher directed practice and how it shapes the nature of child Participation.
- To explore the voices and actions of children in order to make sense of child participation based on their meaning making.
- To make child participation and the related issues of power and control part of a transformative educational agenda for the early years.

1.10. Chapter overview

In this chapter I presented the background and raised issues concerning my study. I discussed essential elements of children, childhood and children's rights. I looked at how images of childhood influence the ways in which child participation is perceived. I also described my journey as a researcher. I showed how the influences of my family and in particular my forefathers played a role in advocating for children's rights. I also showed how my childhood experiences influenced the professional choices I made in my life. I traced the historical origins of human rights and then moved specifically to the origins of children's rights. I discussed how the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child became a starting point for realizing children's rights, both nationally and internationally. I highlighted how the apartheid era contributed to childhood deprivation in South Africa, and the steps that our new democracy took to overcome this. In the final part of this chapter I discussed the history of early childhood education and looked at Grade R. This set the context for the gaps in research which this study addresses.

Chapter Two discusses the conceptual framework that was used to frame this study. I

argue that dominant theories on child development, based on the natural views about children were limiting for this study. Children are only considered as adults in the making. This understanding of children compromises their abilities to participate in aspects that affect their lives. This study favours the social view of children as agents. Children's competencies are valued and children are looked at as people in their own right. The agency view of children resonates well with the notion of child participation in Grade R. In order to interrogate practice, I draw on social constructivism. In the second part of Chapter Two I focus on concepts to understand teacher beliefs. I also present a discussion on beliefs and practice.

Chapter Three focuses on the research approach and the methodology. This study was qualitative in nature, which was the most appropriate approach as I wanted to understand the relationship between the participants, their contexts and participation. I provide details of the participants and contexts within which the research took place. I discuss the multiple methods of data collection undertaken with the teachers and the children. I also show the importance of including children in research as subjects to draw attention to their meaning making abilities.

In-depth discussions of the findings are presented in Chapters Four, Five and Six. These chapters are organised around the research questions. In Chapter Four I show how multiple and complex beliefs influence child participation in particular ways. Chapter Five explores the influence of teacher directed practice on child participation. Chapter Six provides a nuanced understanding of children's meaning making and reveals how they position themselves as agents to participate within teacher created spaces.

Chapter Seven presents the conclusions. I draw on my findings to show the complexities of child participation in relation to teacher beliefs, practice by teachers and agentic actions by children. The conclusions highlight the key issues for a transformative agenda for Grade R which is also important for the years below.

CHAPTER TWO

PERSPECTIVES TO UNDERSTAND CHILD PARTICIPATION

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter I engage with the concept of child participation in order to show the perspectives this study is located in. I highlight the key ideas and I begin the discussion with the natural views about children. I chose this term because it creates common sense thinking about child participation. I contend that when children are viewed as adults in the making, their competence and capabilities are undermined. Both the biological and developmental views of children are discussed to provide insight into how these views shape thinking and action about children.

In order to illuminate the perspective of children I valued in this study, I discuss the social actor (agency) view of children. This perspective is complementary to children's competence as people in their own right, as opposed to perspectives which consider children in terms of their perceived physical and mental immaturity. I present some powerful ideas on what the concept of participation involves when it is linked to children.

The third and final part of this chapter is dedicated to teachers' beliefs. I provide a discussion on different types of beliefs which helped me to make sense of my findings. I explore the factors that influence teacher beliefs. The connectedness between teacher beliefs and practice are also discussed.

2.2 The natural views about children

The natural views about children stem from two perspectives, namely, the biological and the developmental. Both these views present children in terms of their naturalness. Children's growth and development are thought of in universal terms. The ages, stages, milestones and capabilities of children are looked upon in terms of them being typical. Childhood is described by biological facts that focus on life, birth and infancy. These ideas have always been used to explain the social facts of childhood and what children

are capable of (James & Prout, 1990). In my discussion it is important to present the historical and current dominance of the natural views in order to understand their constraining effects.

2.2.1 The biological view (maturation, neuroscience)

A good example of a biologically driven understanding of children is supported by maturational theory (Gesell, 1966). Much of the maturational process is dependent on the child's heredity. Gesell's theory uses growth as a significant marker to highlight individual differences in children. The laws of maturation and sequence are used to understand how children develop.

Maturationists believe that genetics play an important role in steering a child's path to adulthood. As such, growth is seen as a patterning process whereby growth of the body and growth of the mind affect one another (Gesell, 1966). The maturity of the child's nervous system is characterized by stages and natural sequences (Gesell & Ilg, 1949), and each stage is characterized by different behavioural norms (Crain, 1985). Maturation is therefore considered to be a process that occurs in a sequential order which is also bound by a specific time frame.

When Grade R teachers and other adults use maturational theory to inform them about children and child participation, they are inclined to think that children's capacities are predefined and cannot be altered, or that children will always be in deficit to adults as they are biologically programmed in this way. Children are seen as immature and still developing and can only participate fully when they are adults. From this perspective childhood is seen as a period when children are less mature and have less physical strength when compared to older people. This is true, but it does not mean that children are not social actors in their own right of their lives.

It is agreed that young children need protection because of their physical immaturity. It is important, however, to see children's play, language and interactions as symbolic markers of their competence (James, Jenks & Prout, 1998). Therefore, if children are seen as mature in their play, they will be thought of as being confident and competent and this will serve as an indicator of the strengths they bring to childhood (James, Jenks

& Prout, 1998).

Neuroscience offers another natural perspective on the ways in which children are viewed (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000). Neuroscientists are interested in how neural pathways influence development in children. Neuroscience has placed emphasis on how the early experiences, which include nutritional and emotional experiences, stimulate the brain's activity and how these activities can positively or negatively influence the way the brain develops its neural pathways (Mac Naughton, 2003). Neuroscientists are interested in how the formation of neural pathways in the early years influences later development. They argue that the experiences that children are exposed to contribute to the formation of positive neural pathways. (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000).

The arguments offered by neuroscience can hold potential danger, as they are based on blaming the brain if the child is an underperformer (Mac Naughton, 2003). The influence of nature is deeply affected by the environments in which a child is reared, as it is these environments that shape how children respond to early learning. Therefore, when researching child participation, it is necessary to be mindful of how the environments children come from influence the nature of how they participate (Puckett, Marshall, & Davis, 1999).

2.2.2. The developmental view

The developmental view of children is largely informed by traditional developmental psychology which describes children in relation to their natural phenomena, rather than describing them in relation to their social phenomena. In developmental psychology, emphasis is placed on children's naturalness which leads to their maturity (James, Jenks & Prout, 1998; Qvortrup, 2004). From this perspective, children's minds are seen to develop the same way their bodies do. There are universal patterns of ascending growth. These stages of growth display figurative thought which has low status, up to operative intelligence which has high status (James, Jenks & Prout, 1998). This portrays the child as one who is in waiting not fully developed to be considered seriously.

One of the most influential stage theorists who present ideas on children's rationalities is Piaget. Piaget elaborates on the idea of stages that signify the progression of children from one stage to the next. A child can only proceed to the next stage if he has mastered the previous stage (Piaget, 1960).

Piaget's cognitive theory is also referred to as an environmental theory because the experiences that a child will be exposed to in his environment will influence the child's learning and thinking (Gordon & Browne, 2008). This means that the child's interactions with the environment are what creates learning. Piaget's theory emphasizes that children construct their own knowledge (Mooney, 2000). Piaget was interested to know how children can create meaning on their own.

Piaget's theory focuses on the image of teachers who play a nurturing role (Mooney, 2000). The experiences children receive will in turn influence how they develop. Piaget believes that children can thrive intellectually only if their physical growth is well formed. In other words, children's intellectual growth is very much dependent on their physical growth. Piaget's developmental theory is therefore based on the idea that a child's cognitive level controls his social and emotional relations (Cohen, 1983).

Piaget's accounts of child development have influenced many school curricula and Western thought (James & Prout, 1990). However, the theory has been highly criticised for its structured accounts of developmental predetermined stages. Developmental and sequential accounts are outlined as to how children develop and these accounts are presented to appear universally. Piaget's theory assumes that children's cognitive abilities are similar throughout the world (Cohen, 1983). James and Prout (1990) argue that according to Piaget's theory, children are seen as marginalized 'becoming beings' who are awaiting temporary passage to reach adulthood.

Lee (2001) is also critical of Piaget's theory, arguing that Piaget sees children as being distant from reason. Children are seen to have incomplete minds. On their journey of becoming complete adults, they cannot properly speak for themselves as they speak from ignorance and unreason (Lee, 2001). Their individual status as young children is therefore not considered. Moreover, little attention is paid to the role of the social

world in helping the child to make sense of his world.

Piaget's theory neglects the realities of how children's interactions with companions, parents and caregivers contribute to their cognitive development. Thus Piaget's theory focuses on the solitary child. Mayall (2002) confirms this by stating that developmental psychology focuses on the individual and concerns itself with difference. Research was based on the age at which children can rehearse and remember material at certain ages and emphasis was placed on the age at which children begin to plan, perceive depth, understand concepts and are able to classify along dimensions (Rogoff, 1990).

Developmental psychology focuses on who the child will become in the future rather than on who he is now (Mayall, 2002). Although Piaget's theory has impacted some disciplines positively, his theory has also dismissed young children's capacities. As a result, adults have been discouraged from trusting and allowing children to participate (Alderson, 2000). Instead of assuming that children need to reach a certain age before they are able to participate, it might be possible to see that children can understand partly if asked in different ways.

In summary, I could not use the natural views of children stemming from the biological and the developmental perspectives for this study. They offer perspectives to research children in ways in which the interpretive frames are fixed in ages, stages and typicalities according to set norms and expectations. Bearing in mind that most research in this field is of Euro- American origin, it meant that I would have been desensitised to the nuances that the children would present in this study.

2.3 The socio-constructivist view

The socio-constructivist view provides an interesting and inviting lens through which child participation can be viewed and understood. Unlike the natural views of child development which focus on children as irrational 'becoming beings' who will only become rational once they become adults, the socio-constructivist perspective views children as beings in their own right.

According to Vygotsky (1978), children are responsible for their own development with support from adults. They are capable of contributing to their own mental processes as they interact and collaborate with others in meaningful cultural activities (Vygotsky, 1978; Daniels, 2001; Berk & Winsler, 1995). Central to Vygotsky's theory is the idea that, as children participate in cultural activities with the guidance of more skilled partners, they are able to internalize the tools for thinking and begin to adopt more mature approaches to solving problems (Vygotsky, 1978; Berk & Winsler, 1995; Daniels, 2001). It is through culture and social relationships that children learn and are able to make meaning.

As children interact with others in their society, they internalize the social meanings that are derived from the cultural activity in the form of schemas (Daniels, 2001). Smidt (2006) states that, as children interact with more experienced others, they internalize this understanding by making mental images or maps of what has been experienced and understood. This can be understood to mean that the acquisition of knowledge and the making of meaning are socially and culturally derived, rather than being individually constructed (Smidt, 2006).

The ideas shared above are important for an investigation of child participation as they take note of the fact that children can be competent and yet at the same time be in need of support.

2.3.1 Tools or signs

According to Vygotsky (1978), humans live in a universe of signs or tools. It is society that produces the symbolic signs or tools which are also referred to as communicative systems (Smidt, 2006). The signs or tools play an important link between the social and psychological planes of functioning. Not only are tools or signs used for communicative purposes, but they are also used for solving problems.

A tool is seen as an instrument that helps to facilitate an action. For the emergence of signs or tools, there has to be a combination of the more expert partner's behaviour and the child's behaviour. Gradually, children take over these signs and internalize them as they undergo change, structure and function (Vygotsky, 1978; Berk & Winsler, 1995).

Bodrova and Leong (2007) outline the use of mental tools, which help us remember, attend to and think better.

Of importance for this study is the way in which the teacher takes the responsibility to arm children with these mental tools. These mental tools could refer, *inter alia*, to language, mnemonic signs, and mathematical signs. The use of these mental tools becomes evident as the children interact and socialize with the teacher. The children then become active tool users and tool makers, as they tend to also become crafters (Smidt, 2006). Through experience, children will eventually be able to use mental tools and invent new tools when necessary (Bodrova & Leong, 2007).

This study was sensitive to the tools or signs that play an important part in the development of learning or cognition. From a Vygotskian perspective, these tools or signs shape the way the child thinks. It is interesting to note for this study that the objects with which we have experience do not determine our behaviour, but it is the signs that are attached to objects that determine our behaviour (Vygotsky, 1978; Moll, 1990; Daniels, 2001). As such, we attach meanings to those objects and we act in a particular way in relation to the meaning that is attached to that object. Everything has a label attached to it and, as such, it is the signs that restructure the consciousness of humans and it is these signs that influence the consciousness of others.

2.3.2 The role of language

Children are born into the world where they need to communicate with others in order to express their needs, wants and feelings. Rogoff (1990) adds that, as humans, we use language as a tool for solving problems, to engage with others in a cooperative way, to profit from the experiences and inventions of our ancestors, to teach and learn from others, and to plan for distant events. According to Vygotsky, language is considered to be a tool for the mind that mediates relations between people (Vygotsky, 1978; Berk & Winsler, 1995).

Members of a culture use language as a tool to represent their culture and language is used to create a social way of life (Rogoff 1990; Daniels, 2001; Berk & Winsler, 1995). In other words, language is representative of the social history of a particular cultural

group that communicates together to create a particular social way of life. When children socialize they become familiar with that particular culture, and they internalize what it means to be part of that culture as they participate (Smidt, 2006). The child becomes a full member of that culture by making meaning of all aspects of that culture such as the beliefs, practices and values (Smidt, 2006).

For this study it was important to note that as the child interacts and participates in his culture, he uses language as a communicable tool which allows his thinking to take shape and to change. As children interact and socialize with other members of society, they begin to use both verbal and non-verbal forms of communication to express their thoughts and ideas. This espouses to a sense of being for who and what children are capable of now, as they use language for communication rather than for what they are to become later on as adults. Some young children might not be able to express their thoughts through verbal behaviour and they might use non-verbal behaviour to express their thoughts through body language such as pointing, smiling, crying and babbling. Language forms our primary mode of communication and it serves as the mental contact with others.

This study respects the fact that language is considered to be a powerful tool for thinking and communicating. Through experiencing activities and events with others, social experience is built upon. This social experience is represented by language (Vygotsky, 1978; Berk & Winsler, 1995). This study had to be sensitive to how children learn to use language by listening to the way others use it; they thus register and respond accordingly.

2.3.3 Zone of proximal development

The zone of proximal development was important for this study especially in relation to interactions. In the practice chapter and the one that follows, interactions are helpful to understand child participation. As the child collaborates with others - who may be adults or more capable peers in his environment - new cognitive capacities are constructed (Vygotsky, 1978; Berk & Winsler, 1995).

Vygotsky sees a strong link between formal instruction and child development, as

education influences development (Berk & Winsler, 1995). Tasks that the child is unable to accomplish on his own can be accomplished with the help of others and this assistance brings about mental processes that are currently in the stage of developing (Vygotsky, 1978; Berk & Winsler, 1995; Smith, 2002).

Smidt (2006) adds that learners operate at two levels. Firstly, learners operate at the performance level where the child demonstrates that he can do something unaided. Secondly, the child operates at the potential level where he shows that he can achieve something with the help of a more capable peer or adult. The gap between these two levels is known as the zone of proximal development. Cole (1987) describes the zone of proximal development very accurately when it is stated that it is the distance between the actual developmental level in relation to what the child is capable of doing at that particular point in time in relation to independent problem solving, and the level of potential development as would be determined through problem solving under the guidance of an adult or a more capable peer. Self efficacy occurs when a goal is achievable by oneself rather than by observing someone else achieving that goal (Lansdown, 2004).

At the performance level are those functions that have already been mastered and the child can demonstrate what he is able to do on his own, and at the upper level are those functions that are in the process of becoming mastered (Smidt, 2006). Therefore, in order for learning to take place, opportunities that are at an advanced level of the child's development need to be provided. Learning needs to be matched with the child's developmental level. This study values the performance of children who participate in learning through different opportunities.

Teachers' interpretations of the zone of proximal development as they taught concepts in a highly structured way were made visible by this study.

2.3.4 Scaffolding

In scaffolding there is a gap between what a child actually achieves with and without assistance (Vygotsky, 1978; Lansdown, 2004). Scaffolding impacts very positively on

child participation, as children engage and participate in activities that are socially and culturally meaningful. In scaffolding the child is described as a builder and a constructor. Through scaffolding an adult or child adjusts his help in response to the level of performance (Vygotsky, 1978; Lansdown, 2004). In this way children can perform tasks which they are incapable of completing on their own. However, the social environment must be supportive for progress of note to occur (Berk & Winsler, 1995).

In this study the concept of scaffolding was used to make sense of how the participating teachers created both enabling and constraining experiences for child participation. In the next section I show how guided participation plays a role in contributing to understanding child participation in Grade R.

2.4 Guided Participation

Guided participation is a concept that was derived from Rogoff (1990). This study dealt with teaching in practice and its effects on child participation. For this reason it was important to explore the concept of guided participation in conjunction with scaffolding. Guided participation is a process that includes the involvement of both teachers and children in tacit and explicit learning opportunities. Guided participation is similar to scaffolding because both processes call for coordinated efforts with one individual assisting the other. These learning opportunities are heightened by guided participation when teachers build bridges between familiar skills and other skills that are needed to solve new problems (Rogoff, 1990). When teachers and children communicate, teachers guide children to make connections between what children already know and what they need to know in order to learn what is required in handling a new situation.

For this study the idea that teachers provide children with various verbal and non-verbal strategies in order to guide their participation was helpful. Children are provided with meanings and distinctions that are important in their culture (Rogoff, 1990). They can thus use words to identify symbols but they also use words to make sense of the connections that exist between objects (Rogoff, 1990).

When there is collaboration between teachers and children through the use of language

in guided participation where activities are structured, there is close interaction as both parties participate. Adults in such situations make use of verbal and non-verbal strategies such as prompts and other necessary strategies in order to assist children according to their development (Rogoff, 2003).

Another strategy suggested by Rogoff (1990) that was important for this study, is inter-subjectivity. Inter-subjectivity can be regarded as a shared understanding that is based on a common focus of attention. This common focus of attention, together with shared presuppositions, contributes to grounds for communication (Rogoff, 1990). Vygotsky (1978) points out that inter-subjectivity sets the stage for communication and it further aids in extending children's understanding of new information and activities.

2.5 The social actor (agency) view of children

From the perspective of the sociology of childhood, it is evident that the child is viewed as a person with voice and agency (James, Jenks & Prout, 1998). Voice and agency are two powerful components that are used to signify children as agents in childhood (Smith, 2002). "Voice refers to a cluster of intentions, hopes, grievances and expectations that children guard as their own, while agency refers to the fact that children are much more self determining actors than adults usually think" (Pufall & Unsworth, 2004). Childhood is seen as a social institution whereby children are respected as individuals.

The concepts of voice and agency help to disable two key assumptions about children. The first relates to knowledge and the other relates to competence (James, Jenks & Prout, 1998). Often, assumptions are made about adults having high control of knowledge whereas children are presumed to have inferior knowledge and less control. Information is always first hand to the parent/teacher and then, as that information flows to children, it becomes second hand to children. Everything a child says can be said better and can be said with more clarity by an adult. The child's voice can be ignored because it is often assumed that adults' voices are more reliable and useful than the voices of children. The notion of voice and agency, however, tells us that children are extremely knowledgeable and must be listened to. Pascal and Bertram (2009) state

that it is important that children are listened to as it forms an integral part of understanding what children are feeling and experiencing. Additionally, listening to children can make a difference to understanding their priorities, interests and concerns (Pascal & Bertram, 2009).

The assumption that children lack in competence needs to be engaged with. In most activities in the Western world children are often separated from participating in adult activities as they are seen as being incompetent and incapable (James & Prout, 1997).

This study favoured the agentic view of children. This view looks at children as social actors who are shaping and are shaped by their own realities (James, Jenks & Prout, 1998). Ebrahim (2011) argues that agents are social actors who focus on rules and resources in order to immerse themselves in social interaction; this interaction contributes to the production and reproduction of society. In light of the concept of agency, the child is looked upon as holding a participatory role in constructing knowledge through his daily experiences (Mayall, 2002). When children are valued as active agents, they actively participate and, in doing so, they influence and shape their everyday life (Markstrom & Hallden, 2009). As children participate, they contribute to their own childhoods and in this way they become part of a social and cultural construction process as they interact with others (James & James, 2004). As the child interacts and participates with adults, he is voicing his opinions and is thus a valuable participating agent of social relations.

Although Grade R is considered to be an institutionalised and formal space, for this study it was important to keep in mind that children can influence the happenings within this context. Markstrom and Hallden (2009) show us how children can assert power, and in so doing are able to make conquests. Children explore strategies that they can utilize to influence, defend and construct the social order (Markstrom & Hallden, 2009).

Similarly, Ebrahim and Francis (2008), in the South African context, show how three- and four-year-olds actively construct the notion of difference related to race and gender.

The children use the repertoires of meaning available to them to categorise others and themselves to construct their social order. Bhana (2002) noted how boys and girls in early schooling in the South African context made their gender through actively appropriating gendered meanings to make sense of who they were and how they should act in the spaces that implicated them. The above are a few studies that attempted to understand child participation in the South African context. These studies prompt the need for a close, focused study on the nature of child participation.

The findings above alert us to the fact that children in Grade R will engage with others and explore the possibilities offered to them or hidden from them. Moreover, they will be able to make choices and explore boundaries as well. As participating agents they will also be challenged with the constraints and difficulties of making their social worlds. They will learn to make choices as they discover what it means to be part of a group, and how they are making significant contributions to their thinking and doing. Although children are dependent on adults, they are capable of performing tasks based on their competence with or without the guidance of adults.

When children are viewed as active agents of their childhoods, they are valued for who they are *now* and they can tell us more about their childhoods than we as adults would normally understand. The agency view resonates well with the 'being' view in the sociology of childhood (James, Jenks & Prout, 1998; James & Prout, 1997).

In summary, this section has highlighted a counter view to natural constructions of children. The idea of children as social actors casts them as people who have voice and agency. Both these concepts provide a view of children as actively constructing their childhoods in the context they find themselves in. For this study the social actor view of children is most suitable. It weakens the dominant idea that children are weak, passive and incapable of making a contribution to issues affecting their lives. The notions of power and voice are deepened in the next section.

2.6 The notions of power and voice

The extent to which children are agents is influenced by power plays which enable voices or silences them. The work of Freire and Foucault shed light on the concepts of power and voice.

Power is a concept that makes individuals feel more human. When Freire (1970) speaks of power, he makes a point of how people can be humanized or dehumanized when they do or do not have power. When a person has power he feels humanized and is liberated and when power is taken away he is dehumanized. Similarly, Foucault (1977) refers to the effects of power as being both positive and negative. Foucault (1977) argues that oppositions of power such as men over women or adults over children have some things in common. For example, they assert the right to be different and underlie everything that makes the individual truly individual whilst on the other hand they attach everything that separates the individual. To give children voice is to give them power.

Humanization and dehumanization bring about ideas on how oppressors oppress the oppressed. When individuals are dehumanized they are raped of their power; there is injustice and there are elements of exploitation (Freire, 1970). When oppressors exploit the oppressed, they steal their humanity and this makes the oppressor feel more human and powerful. Foucault (1977) claims that when power is taken from an individual, it subjects him to someone else's control and dependence. Dehumanization does not only refer to those who steal the humanity of the oppressed, but it also refers to those who have stolen it (Freire, 1970). In Grade R power is unevenly distributed between what the curriculum prescribes, how teachers allow children to participate, and how children use their own power to influence participation.

It might seem that power lies only in the hands of the oppressor, but power also lies in the hands of the oppressed. Foucault (1977) states that man appears as an object of knowledge but as a subject that knows. Foucault (1977) states that power produces knowledge and discourse. As such, power characterizes the individual and attaches him

to his own identity (Foucault, 1977). In being a subject, the individual is both an active and a knowing subject of an object being acted upon in a product of discourse.

Freire (1970) states that there is a great humanistic task that the oppressed are faced with and that is to liberate both themselves and those that oppress them as this type of liberation cannot be achieved by the oppressor. With reference to Grade R, it can be noted that because some teachers might resort to the becoming view of the child, they will not necessarily value children's agency. Children could be oppressed within this context and their participation will be constrained. However, children also have the ability to show us their power in momentary ways which positions them as knowing subjects.

Oppressors offer tokenistic approaches in situations that have oppressive dynamics. When oppressors offer their false 'generosity', it results in the formation of an unjust social order which is marked by death, despair and poverty (Freire, 1970). This is clearly indicative of our unjust past which was discussed in Chapter One. Oppressors who give false charity prevent individuals from progressing; this leads them to be subservient to those that oppress them. Conversely, true generosity results in fighting to destroy the cause of false charity. True generosity results in empowering the oppressed so that they can have a hand in transforming the world.

In another vein, when the struggle begins, the oppressed are inclined to become oppressors or sub-oppressors (Freire, 1970). Because the oppressed have been so conditioned by the oppressors, they tend to become sub-oppressors when they gain their liberation. The oppressed see their manhood in the oppressor. In a way it is a form of adhesion and they are blinded by the oppressor's oppression; hence they cannot see beyond the oppression and therefore subscribe to being sub-oppressors themselves. After having internalized the behaviour of the oppressor, the oppressed are fearful of freedom as it is freedom that requires of them to be autonomous and it is freedom that places the heavy burden of responsibility on them. Although the oppressed realize that they need their freedom in order to survive, they also suffer from a duality and find it difficult to make choices between being spectators or actors, between following

prescriptions or having choices, between speaking out or being silent. They are castrated in their power to create and recreate and to transform the world (Freire, 1970).

It could be argued that Grade R teachers may also become sub-oppressors as they are oppressed by what the curriculum prescribes. As technicians delivering the curriculum teachers then oppress children's agency which enables high levels of child participation. In order for the oppressed to be able to strive for liberation, they must look at the reality of oppression not as a closed world from which there is no exit, but as a limiting situation which they can transform. The ideas of power are further explored through pedagogy and how the teacher and the children in the Grade R class communicate. This power invested in teachers becomes evident through the ways in which they are directed by the curriculum to teach and deliver in certain ways.

Freire (1970) alerts us to the idea of narration sickness whereby teachers use words as lifeless objects that carry no meaning. Words are used as a medium to fill students with the contents of narration to fill children with knowledge rather than as a means of transforming their thinking. As such, children memorize and repeat after the teacher without perceiving what the words truly mean. Narration is used by the teacher in ways that lead children to memorize mechanically, thus converting children into containers that must be filled with knowledge. In this manner education becomes a banking process whereby the teacher becomes the depositor and the children are the depositories (Freire, 1970). Instead of communicating, the teacher deposits while the children receive, memorize and repeat. Freire (1970) regards this as the 'banking' concept of education.

This concept stifles children's creativity and their pursuit of transformation and knowledge. The banking concept can be linked to Foucault's (1977) notion of discourse which can constrain the possibility of thought. Foucault (1977) points to how discourses of different disciplines which pass by as unquestioned 'truths' position individuals to form their own notions of appropriate or desired practices. As such, discourse can be an instrument of power which limits the individual's train of creative thinking.

The banking concept education is highly possible when a standards based approach which is instructivist in nature is used (Anning, 1991). When there is structure too early, the potential to push the boundaries is not fully realized and the process for learning through discovery is limited; thus more focus is directed at product rather than at process.

Freire (1994) argues that in order to transform society, individuals need to immerse themselves in a pedagogy of liberation. This can only occur through acts of cognition and not through transferral of information (Freire, 1994). Furthermore, cognition is enhanced through dialogue that occurs between teachers and children as co-investigators who are jointly responsible for the success of all that grow together.

The process of conscientizacao recognizes that society is pluralistic, diverse and complex in nature (Freire, 1994). However, these forms of pluralism and diversity are not engaged with when uniformity in children's education is sort. Grade R classrooms must be spaces where conscientizacao is actively engaged with in order to deal with inequalities that characterizes early education. For this to happen teachers must consciously position themselves as agents of transformation.

Although Grade R is seen as a space for transformation, there are still oppressing factors located in the broader system of basic education that limit possibilities. For example the expectations associated with curriculum delivery stifle teachers' and children's efforts to participate at optimal levels. It is not surprising that teachers would resort to being depositors of knowledge rather than enablers of learning. The curriculum sets tight boundaries and limitations that constrain child participation; hence the power and voice of both the teachers and the children in Grade R go unheard.

In summary, this section has shed light on the importance of power and voice as instrumental contributors to child participation in Grade R. The notion of participation is deepened in the next section.

2.7 Unpacking child participation

Closely linked to the notion of the agentic child and participation are the ideas of Hart (1997) and Lansdown (2004). Both offer ideas to understand participation as having different levels. Hart offers the concept of the ladder of participation (Hart, 1997). Lansdown (2004) sheds light on degrees of participation. Both these explanations of participation help to understand the child's actions, activities and interactions either with teachers or with peers.

Lansdown (2004) focuses on three degrees of participation which are the consultative degree, the participatory degree, and the self-initiated degree of participation. The consultative degree of participation focuses on adults consulting young children on their views and their experiences and adults acknowledging that children have a contribution to make. However, the consultative process is adult led and adult managed, and there are limited opportunities for real engagement with children (Lansdown, 2004). The consultative degree of participation links closely with Hart's level of decoration and tokenism. In both these levels of Hart's ladder children are given a voice, but have little or no choice about the style of communicating the subject (Hart, 1997). At both these levels the children do not fully understand the intentions of the activities or projects. The level of consulted and informed participation occurs when the project or activities are designed and run by adults and children have little or no say in the design of them. Although Hart (1997) describes the levels of decoration and tokenism as non-participatory, within the Grade R context I see it as participatory but at a weak level in the pillar of teacher directed and teacher initiated participation.

The next degree of participation is the participatory degree which provides opportunities for children's active involvement (Lansdown, 2004). This degree is adult initiated but it involves partnerships with children and, as such, children are involved in projects, programmes, research or activities. The participatory degree links well with Hart's adult initiated shared decisions with children (Hart, 1997). This level of Hart's ladder is considered to be true participation because, although the participation is initiated by adults, the children are involved in decision making and this is a shared

process (Hart, 1997).

The last degree of participation that Lansdown (2004) refers to is the self-initiated degree of participation. In this degree, children's agency is at a high level as they are empowered and therefore take action. In other words, children are in control. Issues of concern are identified by the children, and adults act as facilitators rather than as leaders. Children's capacities are given full respect and there are partnerships created between children and adults.

The degree of self-initiated participation links with a combination of Hart's level of child-initiated and child-directed participation. At this level children take on complex tasks using their own initiatives and ideas. According to Hart (1997), this type of child-initiated shared decisions with adults usually occurs with teenagers. However, it is also possible that this type of child-initiated shared decisions occurs with younger children and this is usually featured in their play. Children are the leaders whilst adults act as facilitators. However, it must be noted that for child-initiated shared decisions to take place with adults, young children will be faced with power struggles related to adult and child interaction.

Both Lansdown and Hart, through their models, provide greater clarity from a human rights perspective on participation. The latter can be seen as a vehicle to drive children and young people to challenge and bring about change in the systems that often ignore, harm or exclude children (Willow, 2002). The foundation for strong citizenship is laid in the early years. Willow (2002) argues that child participation becomes beneficial when adults take a genuine interest in listening to and respecting a child's views. In this manner both the adult's and the child's relationships are enhanced. Pascal and Bertram (2009) confirm this notion by stating that participation of young children allows one 'to tune' in to all young children as individuals in their everyday lives.

Participation has the power to shape individuals in that it strengthens and develops an

individual's citizenship (Hart, 1997). Through direct participation, children can develop a genuine appreciation of democracy and they can develop a sense of competence and responsibility (Hart, 1997).

2.7.1 The value of child participation and the effects of a lack of focus on child participation

The value of child participation lies in the fact that children become independent and resilient as they participate and become active social beings. Participation offers children valuable opportunities to improve their social and communication skills and their learning skills are also enhanced (Willow, 2002). Through participation, children show us their levels of active competence, and this tells us that they can contribute to society (Lansdown, 2004). When child participation is enhanced, young children's self-esteem, confidence and overall capacities are increased. When children are invited to participate, they can be recognised as active agents as they show us how they can influence and shape their lives (Markstrom & Hallden, 2009). When productive and real opportunities are given to children to participate, they receive a sense of power which allows them to shape both the *process* and *outcome* of their participation. In this way participation acknowledges children's abilities. Experience and interest play a key role in determining the nature of child participation (Lansdown, 2004). Therefore, when child participation is purposeful, the outcome of the participation becomes more meaningful for the child.

It must be noted that there are stumbling blocks to child participation. Smith (2002) notes that we need to pay attention to how child participation is construed in different institutions. This point is particularly important for the Grade R context. It is the teacher's beliefs about children that s/he teaches that will afford children the opportunities to participate. Children have to feel a sense of belonging and inclusion in order to participate. However, it is often the case that children do not feel a sense of inclusion.

The lack of attention to child participation stems from teachers'/adults' underestimating the competencies that children possess. As such, they do not pay sufficient attention to the self-expressions and views of children (Willow, 2002). Children's comments or suggestions are often met with reservations. The thought of participation often brings doubt to the minds of adults, especially to those that have narrow views of child participation and adult power.

Very often, children's age becomes a disabling factor that labels them as too young to know and that their views do not count. Adults are always positioned at a superior level and the notion exists that adults have far more experience than children and that adults know best (Miller, 2003). Children do have the competence to participate appropriately in matters that concern them, but applying the concept of participation to young children still remains problematic as some adults still conform to traditional notions of children's incompetence. Very often, children are viewed from an angle that is favoured from an adult perspective and, as such, there are limitations in that adults decide on what children can and cannot do (Willow, 2002). Children are thus not given a genuine opportunity to participate, as their abilities are underestimated.

Another problem that creates a barrier to participation is that adult language is often seen as being superior to that of children (Lansdown, 2004). Research has shown that there are appropriate ways in which children can communicate their views and these are through drawing, painting, role play, music, and photography (Lansdown, 2004). There needs to be a deeper understanding and focus on the part of adults on the competencies of children to participate. There needs to be a deeper engagement between adults and children in that adults need to respect and encourage children's views and ideas (Willow, 2002). Adults need to assume a stronger position by focusing on the abilities and competencies of young children as worthy; only then will the idea of participation be better enhanced.

Within the context of the early childhood classroom, Grade R teachers may feel that

control is the only power they have and they may be reluctant to give up that power (Miller, 2003). They believe that power is only shared when children can conform to what they as adults expect of them. There is an imbalance between the power held between adults and children; therefore there is some reluctance to value children as participants. Power sharing is often limited to the expectations of adults.

However, it is important to be mindful of the fact that early childhood teachers are under immense pressure to deliver the formal curriculum of the Foundation Phase. This was found to be particularly true of the Grade R teachers who participated in this study. Teachers' performance and accountabilities are linked to reaching specific outcomes. In this context it is possible that child participation, where there is full involvement of children in the processes of learning and agenda setting, might be limited. Another factor that influences whether teachers afford strong or weak opportunities for child participation is the way in which teachers are trained. If they continue to be fed with images from natural constructions of children, then it is likely that child participation will be at lower levels.

In summary, the degrees and levels of participation offered by Lansdown and Hart provide clarity on how child participation could be understood. Adults who work with young children need to establish a stronger understanding of the competencies of young children, which they also need to respect. It could be argued that once adults understand and appreciate the competencies of children, only then can children feel really enabled to achieve their intended outcomes.

2.8 Teacher beliefs

In this section I explore the key ideas around teacher beliefs. These ideas were helpful in understanding how teacher beliefs shaped child participation in the study.

2.8.1 *Types of beliefs*

Rokeach (1976), Pajares (1992) and Perry (1970) provide sensitising concepts that underpinned the exploration of teachers' beliefs in this study.

2.8.1.1 *Existential beliefs*

This study valued the fact that the teachers who participated in the study had personal beliefs that had been shaped by their experiences. Pajares (1992) argues that existential beliefs are deeply personal and are therefore unlikely to change. Existential beliefs can be considered to be true as they are often formed by chance. Existential beliefs are reaffirmed by the experiences we encounter on a daily basis. Such beliefs are deeply personal and are often unaffected by persuasion. As such, these beliefs are formed by chance. Experience plays a major role in the formation of these existential beliefs and, if events are continually repeated, then these also form the basis for the individual's beliefs.

Existential beliefs often include beliefs about the self and beliefs about other individuals. Existential beliefs exist beyond an individual's control or knowledge and they exist because it is often presumed that they are immutable (Pajares, 1992). In other words, when an existential belief is beyond an individual's control, it is very difficult to change. A belief that links very closely to existential beliefs is that of epistemological beliefs.

2.8.1.2 *Epistemological beliefs*

In this study it was important to explore teachers' beliefs about themselves, their professional standing and how they viewed child participation. This fell within the ambit of epistemological beliefs which are described as beliefs that are about the nature of knowing and knowledge (Hofer & Pintrich, 1997). Much research has focused on the link between teachers' epistemological beliefs and their teaching practices, but very little research has been conducted on the relationship between teachers' epistemological beliefs and early childhood education (Brownlee & Berthelsen, 2005). Various types of

beliefs have been identified in the literature.

Research shows that there is a strong link between teachers' epistemological beliefs and their teaching practices. Apart from the link between teachers' epistemological beliefs and their teaching practices, a link has also been found between teachers' epistemological beliefs and their conceptions of learning (Spodek & Saracho, 2003). Often, there can be changes in epistemological beliefs. When changes in epistemological beliefs occur, they are usually bounded by contexts and learning experiences. Epistemological beliefs are socially constructed and, therefore, individuals make meaning of their experiences and contexts.

2.8.1.3 Primitive beliefs

This study explored beliefs that emanated from childhood and the family context. According to Rivalland (2007), primitive beliefs are derived during childhood from family and social contexts and provide the individual with a sense of self and group identity. Primitive beliefs are considered to be an important type of belief as they contribute to other beliefs and influence these other beliefs. They are basic beliefs acquired during childhood and they play an important role in how the individual sees the world (Rokeach, 1960; 1976).

2.8.1.4 Absolutist beliefs

Absolutist beliefs develop in situations where knowledge is understood to be in a domain where there cannot be any changes (Rokeach, 1960; 1976). Knowledge remains static and absolute. As such, this knowledge does not need to be examined as the source of this knowledge is considered to be the 'right' knowledge. Absolutist beliefs tie in well with assumptions about dualisms (for more details see the next section). These beliefs are surrounded by an underlying message that they need not be questioned, as the source of these beliefs is reputable because they come from a source of authority.

As individuals we cannot always find the answers about the world by ourselves and therefore, we turn to authorities who take on the role of intermediaries (Rokeach, 1960; 1976). These intermediaries provide the individual with sources of information; therefore the individual depends on these positive or negative authorities to give

information about the world. An individual's belief often is received at a second hand level because much of this belief comes from somebody else's prior belief, which is often considered to be more trustworthy than others. When one considers authority, it can be defined as any source that the individual looks to for information about the universe, or to check the information that the individual already possesses.

2.8.2 Assumptions associated with beliefs

2.8.2.1 Dualism

Dualism is referred to as the simplest set of assumptions about the nature of knowledge and values (Perry, 1970). This belief portrays a division of meaning into two areas or realms. In other words, there are right answers that exist somewhere for every problem and these right answers are known by authorities. Anything that falls outside the ambit is wrong.

From this position of duality, a person understands all issues of truth and morality as a division between authority and what is seen as right against the alien world of the illegitimate wrong of others (Perry, 1970). Within the educational context, morality means committing to memory through hard work and, through hard work, there have to be correct responses and answers as these procedures are assigned by authority. Authority knows best and, therefore, one needs to adhere to what authority wants. Authority asks one to be obedient and there needs to be self controlled learning (Perry, 1970). Authority has the answers to everything, and it is so taken for granted that there is no distinction between authority and the absolute.

Teachers who subscribe to a dualistic belief will adopt more transmitting approaches of teaching and learning. A dualistic belief will be limiting for participation to occur. It will create hierarchies of who is knowledgeable and in authority and who is not. Adults/teachers will naturally be placed in stronger positions as compared with children.

2.8.2.2 Multiplism

Multiplism is a developmental step from dualism. In this position individuals hold differences of opinion and values which are recognised and considered to be valid in

areas where the right answers are not yet known (Perry, 1970). In this position the individual takes his stand, and there is a process of individuation whereby the individual sees things differently. In this position the individual begins to form his own opinion and questions what those in authority have to say. In addressing a problem, he finds the answers for himself (Perry, 1970). Individuals who hold multiplist views of thinking see knowledge that is based on personal opinion.

Of importance to this study was the notion that teachers might recognise that, although there might be some absolute truths, some things cannot be seen with certainty (Brownlee & Berthelsen, 2005). Therefore, the personal truth that individuals possess can be accepted until the truth is discovered. For these types of teachers knowledge of child participation, for example, remains personal and, as such, they may not feel the need to examine this knowledge.

2.8.2.3 Relativism

Within the position of relativism, diversity of opinion is dependent upon evidence (Perry, 1970). There is a search for meaning and understanding that are based on evidence and facts rather than on opinions. Knowledge is considered to be qualitative rather than quantitative. Relativism brings about a major shift in epistemological thinking because individuals acknowledge that knowledge is actively and personally constructed and evaluated (Brownlee, Berthelsen & Boulton-Lewis, 2007).

Teachers who hold relativistic beliefs will often subscribe to constructivist practices in which they want to develop active teaching and learning (Brownlee, Berthelsen & Boulton-Lewis, 2007). Thus, partnerships are formed between teachers and children that involve construction of meaning. Teachers who subscribe to relativistic beliefs will conceive teaching and learning as facilitating rather than transmitting knowledge (Brownlee, Berthelsen & Boulton-Lewis, 2007).

2.8.3 Factors related to teachers' beliefs

There is limited evidence to show how teachers' beliefs are strengthened or weakened (Nespor, 1987; Kagan, 1992). The process of enculturation and social construction contains important points that need to be borne in mind when considering the factors related to teacher beliefs. Van Fleet (1979) places emphasis on the role of cultural transmission. Culture plays a huge role in shaping teachers' beliefs. In this regard teachers acquire their knowledge and beliefs about teaching through the processes of enculturation, education and schooling.

Enculturation involves the incidental learning that individuals experience in their lives. Research shows that the way teachers experienced their own school environments when they were children shapes their beliefs and practices about teaching and learning (Ayers, 1989; Clandinin & Connelly, 1996 as cited in Levin & Wadmany, 2006). Lortie (2002) states that teachers' beliefs are formed during their own schooling and these beliefs form a contextual filter which helps them to process their teaching experiences and, in turn, to adapt their classroom practices.

Teachers formed their beliefs when they were children by interacting with people through socially mediated activities (Karpov, 2005). Their beliefs are also influenced by present and past interactions. Individuals do undergo incidental learning processes throughout their lives. This learning occurs through processes of assimilation, observation, participation and imitation. Van Fleet (1979) proposes that individuals understand the events of their lives only within the context of cultural systems. As individuals engage in an activity that is part of their cultural system, they are able to internalize it and thus a belief is formed and becomes meaningful.

Stipek and Byler (1997) found that teachers who held stronger beliefs in basic skill practices that included highly structured, teacher directed instruction were less likely to implement child-centred approaches to access the curriculum. One of the main tasks of education is to bring behaviour in line with cultural requirements (Pajares, 1992).

The effect of school culture also contributes to the formation of teachers' beliefs. Research shows that the social context of the school can influence the formation of

teachers' beliefs and practices (McLaren, 2003). In many school contexts the beliefs of other teachers impact greatly on those of individual teachers. More especially, if there is a correlation between a specific belief held by teachers, the individual teacher is more likely to accept that belief. Thus, within the school environment there is an interrelationship between teachers' beliefs, school culture and school climate.

The school is the central point where ideas are shared and exchanged. As teachers engage, observe and interact with other individuals, they tend to build their own beliefs about teaching and learning and about the school environment. As individuals in the school environment, teachers share their ideas as they hold a common ideal (Spodek & Saracho, 2003). These ideals are representative of a community. In addition to this, Aldemir and Sezer (2009) claim that individuals' beliefs are influenced by cultures and traditions and these beliefs are carried with them wherever they go. Once teachers have acquired beliefs, it becomes very difficult to alter them.

One of the factors that contribute towards beliefs is channeled through enculturation, which shows how the occurrence of interactions that are charged through culture forms an individual's beliefs. In this section we also note that when teachers are confronted with new environments they tend to question their existing beliefs and thus embark on constructing new beliefs. This study revealed that teachers' beliefs are complex. I found that many contributory factors formed and shaped teachers' beliefs.

2.8.4 The relationship between teachers' beliefs and classroom practices

Teachers' beliefs hold strong implications for practice as it is commonly understood that it is their beliefs that guide and direct the practice of teachers. Thus beliefs impact on curriculum and pedagogy and there is often a mediating line between teachers' knowledge and their performance (Hedges, 2000).

The beliefs that teachers hold can influence the decisions they carry out in the classroom. There is a connectedness between beliefs and practices. However, some research indicates that practices are not always congruent with teachers' beliefs. Beliefs shape the way in which teachers design and carry out their classroom practices.

However, some studies show that because some teachers face challenging situations in their classroom practices, these challenges often limit their ability to provide instruction that is congruent with their beliefs (Pajares, 1992). The innovations that teachers think of utilising in their classrooms are determined by the beliefs that they possess. Beliefs act as a filter that assists teachers when they implement instructional activities and make curricular decisions (Pajares, 1992; Prawat, 1992).

It is also evident that the connection between what teachers' beliefs are and what they practice is not always very convincing. There is little correlation between teachers' beliefs and their classroom practices. Beliefs serve as a strong indicator as to why and how teachers adopt new teaching approaches in the classroom (Golombek, 1998). In relation to this, the new teaching methods that teachers choose to adopt in their classrooms are influenced by the beliefs that they hold. The stronger the belief that a teacher holds, the more likely it is that the belief will surface in practice. As Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) state, the strength of a belief is noted by the subjective probability that the teacher will perform the behaviour in question.

The personal beliefs that teachers hold have a strong impact on what teachers learn from professional development programmes, and teachers' personal beliefs also influence their curricular decisions and the teaching practices that they undertake. It is also noted that teachers are comfortable in adopting teaching practices that are consistent with their personal epistemological beliefs (Yocum, 1996). If there is a level of compatibility between teachers' personal beliefs and educational reform, then there is a strong possibility that these new ideas will be accepted and implemented in the classroom (Levin & Wadmany, 2006).

As children progress from the pre-school grades into the primary grades, there is less correlation between beliefs and practices. There has been a focus on how developmentally appropriate beliefs affect practice. Teachers often claim to believe that their activities should meet the cognitive and age specific needs of the children, but this belief does not surface in their practice (Charlesworth, Hart, Burts & Hernandez, 1990). When children's grade levels increase, the beliefs about developmentally appropriate

practice decrease (Saracho & Spodek, 2003). As such, the beliefs that teachers hold about developmentally appropriate practice do not align with their practices. There may be possible reasons for the mismatch between teachers' beliefs and their practices and this could be related to little support from parents and colleagues, lack of resources, and poor administration. This mismatch can be noted from a perusal of the materials, classroom activities and behaviour of the teacher (Saracho & Spodek, 2003).

A good example of how teachers' beliefs in early childhood affected their practice can be seen in Mac Naughton's (2000) study of gender. She links child participation and gender to particular ways of knowing gender. The biological view of the child provides the adult with an understanding of how to invite participation. She shows how the biological and the post- structural views of the child affect the way in which activities are planned for application in the classroom (Mac Naughton, 2000). For example, some teachers may have the view that only girls can play in the fantasy area and therefore she plans it in such a way that girls often go to this area. On the other hand, some teachers assume that boys only play with cars, trucks and guns and, as such, the teacher plans for these activities for boys to participate accordingly.

As Smith (1982) states, children do not conform to adult views of stereotyped sex roles. Teachers who hold a constructivist view of children feel that only when a child is cognitively able, can the child form his own decisions about gender identity (Mac Naughton, 2003). Bearing this in mind, teachers adopt a "business as usual approach" where children's understanding of gender diversity and other types of diversity is a stage that they pass through. Children's understandings are natural for their stage of development and, as such, teachers should only raise issues of gender diversity when children are cognitively ready for it (Mac Naughton, 2003).

In summary, it must be noted that teachers' beliefs hold serious implications for classroom practice. When teachers in Grade R subscribe to certain types of beliefs they will have varying consequences for child participation. Grade R teachers need to recognize their existing beliefs in order to change limiting ones.

2.9 Conclusion

This chapter focused on creating an understanding of perspectives informing child participation in this study. The concepts discussed in this chapter helped to make meaning of the nature of child participation in the Grade R context. To show my location in this study, I began with an examination of different images of children in early care and education. I showed how the dominant natural view of the child creates taken for granted assumptions about children's abilities. Children's bodies are used to make assumptions about their minds.

This study favoured the agency view of children. The latter affords opportunities to enable children to be social actors. For participation to be effective in practice, I explained how concepts from socio-constructivism help to make sense of child participation. The active child in need of support and learning through interactions and connections was highlighted.

The discussion on participation showed how notions of power and voice are implicated in understanding the doings of children. I also showed that it is possible to think of degrees and levels of child participation. Lansdown and Hart afford explanations that create understanding of weak and strong levels of participation. My discussion on teacher beliefs showed that the different types of beliefs are implicated in the study of child participation. I draw on these loosely in the findings chapters. The next chapter will focus on the methodology of the study.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCHING CHILD PARTICIPATION

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter I explain the methodological path that I took to generate data for my study. In order to deeply engage with the research question, "What is the nature of child participation in Grade R in the greater Cape Town area?" I employed a qualitative approach using a case study. This approach helped me to be sensitive to teachers' and children's subjective experiences. The study took place in three Grade R sites with five Grade R teachers and fifteen children as participants. In this study the three schools together with the learners and the teachers were bounded as a case study.

I used multiple methods to produce data for this study. The data for examining teacher beliefs were produced through semi-structured interviews. Video recordings were used to observe the teachers' practice in order to ascertain how they dealt with child participation. The videotaping also helped to capture the voices and actions of the children in their meaning making efforts. I also used field notes to record some moments during the video-taping process. Since research is a complex process, this chapter also outlines the challenges I experienced in conducting this study, the ethical issues that were involved, and the data analysis procedures employed.

3.2 Research Approach and Case Study

Taking into account the discussion in the previous chapter on child participation as socially constructed, it was most appropriate to undertake a research approach that was qualitative in nature. Very early in my study I came to the conclusion that a quantitative design was unfavourable. I wanted to understand the nature of child participation both from the Grade R teachers' and the children's perspectives. Quantitative research relies very much on linear models that offer scale descriptions (Barbour, 2009). I was not interested in numerical measurement of how much child participation was happening or how many children were participating as agents in their learning. I believed that a

numerical thrust would have proved futile in understanding the nature of child participation. I needed a comprehensive understanding of child participation, and a qualitative approach would be most appropriate to achieve this aim.

Corbin and Strauss (2008) note that in qualitative research distance is not what the researcher wants to establish between him or herself and the participants. Rather, what is sought is a strong connection at a human level that adds meaning to the research process. I wanted to listen to and observe the participants in my study. Gay and Airasian (2003) state that participants' perspectives on practices, events and beliefs become clearer in qualitative research.

Litchman (2006) reminds us that a qualitative researcher gathers, organizes and interprets information by using his eyes and ears as a filter so that the experiences of participants are captured in authentic ways. A qualitative researcher demystifies the data collected to provide detailed accounts of experience (Barbour, 2009). Qualitative research also seeks to explore the different interactions and processes that are made salient in the lives of people who form part of a cultural group or institution (O'Leary, 2010).

Denzin and Lincoln (2011) state that qualitative research is a combination of interpretive and material practices that helps to make the world visible for the qualitative researcher. Thus the researcher carrying out a qualitative study becomes a located observer in the world (Creswell, 2013). As qualitative researchers try to make sense and interpret what meaning participants bring to their understanding there is also a strong orientation for qualitative researchers to transform the world (Cresswell, 2013). Qualitative methods assist researchers in determining how people understand concepts (Silverman, 2005). Qualitative research enables researchers to focus on the context of people's everyday lives. Thus qualitative research becomes meaningful as it relates to the true essence of reality as and when it occurs.

In adopting a qualitative approach, I chose to use a case study because it reveals the single instance of a bounded system. In this study the three schools that I had selected together with the Grade R learners and the teachers were bounded as a case study.

There are several strengths that made the case study an obvious choice for a study on child participation. Cohen, Manion & Morrison (2008) state that case studies reveal unique examples of real people in real situations. This enables readers to understand the ideas more clearly than simply presenting them with abstract theories or principles. A further strength of case studies is that they observe effects in real contexts taking into consideration the powerful impact of context on cause and effect (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2008). Hitchcock and Hughes (1995) also provide the following strengths of case studies which were relevant for this study:

- It is concerned with a rich and vivid description of events relevant to the case.
- It provides a chronological narrative of events relevant to the case.
- It blends a description of events with the analysis of them.
- It focuses on individual actors or groups of actors and seeks to understand their perceptions of events.
- It highlights specific events that are relevant to the case.
- The researcher is integrally involved in the case.
- An attempt is made to portray the richness of the case in writing up the report.

The teachers in Grade R and children formed part of a case study. These two groupings made up the unit of analysis. A qualitative research approach using a case study helped me to understand the complex realities and processes associated with unpacking the nature of child participation in Grade R. Through my approach I was able to gain a close understanding of the people, places and situations associated with child participation in the Grade R context. Additionally, I was able to understand how participation is enabled and constrained. I was able to work in flexible ways and to be sensitive to the nuances in the context that I investigated. The qualitative approach did not exclude the multiple identities held during the research process, namely, the researcher, teacher and visitor.

3.2. The Research Paradigm

This study is located in the interpretive paradigm. Interpretivist researchers want to understand how participants understand people and how they make sense of the world. Babbie & Mouton (2001) state that interpretivist researchers continuously interpret, create, give meaning, define, justify and rationalise daily actions. For interpretivists, the individual's social and material circumstances are made sense of within a cultural framework through socially constructed and shared meanings (Mac Naughton, 2003; Mukherji & Albon, 2010).

When the researcher undertakes a study in an interpretivist paradigm, the data on people's experiences need to be interpreted and are not just out there waiting to be interpreted (Rolfe, 2001; Mac Naughton, 2003). There is an active process of producing data with people and then interpreting it either as a researcher or with the participants or using both. Interpretivists argue that our behaviour is influenced by our interpretations of the world. How we see and perceive the world lead to our actions in relation to it.

The researcher who subscribes to an interpretivist paradigm wants to understand the subjective meanings participants bring to the research process (De Vos, Strydom, Fouche & Delport, 2011). Interpretivists believe that true meaning is not likely to be simple or obvious; instead, it can only be achieved through a detailed study of the text. Thus underlying messages and connections can be explored between the whole and its parts (Neuman, 2003). In this way the interpretivist researcher is interested in how people interact with one another and how they get along. As such, interpretivists make meaning and look for rich, deep understandings that are derived from the data (Neuman, 2000).

As an interpretivist researcher, I wanted to develop an understanding of what meanings the children and teachers constructed as they participated within the context of Grade R, which was considered to be their natural setting. Participants lived realities were important. Additionally, I was interested in deriving meaning from

participants' experiences through the use of language (Schwandt, 2007).

3.3 The research context and samples

Before selecting the Grade R sites and the participants for this study, I consulted colleagues at my institution and the chief curriculum advisor for Grade R from the Western Cape Education Department (WCED). Considering that I relocated from Durban and was unfamiliar with the Grade R sites, the input received proved useful as my informants also provided me with contextual understanding of the sites.

This study included public sites inclusive of female Grade R teachers and Grade R children who were both boys and girls. All Grade R classes in this study were overseen by the Department of Education. I collected data from two Grade R classrooms that formed part of the Foundation Phase (FP) of a public primary school. I also collected data from a site that catered for young children between the ages of 3 and 6. This is commonly known as a free standing, independent/community based Grade R site which feeds into the Foundation Phase, i.e. Grade One, at a public school. The Grade R sites were housed in particular contexts. I refer to these as Context One, Context Two and Context Three in the study. All sites in this study included children and teachers of two different races. The contexts catered for both boys and girls aged 5 turning 6 (See tables below for more details).

The above made my sampling procedure purposive. De Vos et al. (2011) state that purposive sampling is left entirely on the judgment of the researcher, as the researcher is aware of the characteristics that are most representative of the study. The main criterion for the selection of the sample was the fitness for purpose. I made the conscious choice to include people that I felt would fill the gap in knowledge about child participation at the grassroots level, namely teachers and children. These two groupings are intimately associated with the micro-life of practice and hence were most suitable for my study. I acknowledge the limitation of not including school management, parents and district officials. Whilst this response would have given a more holistic and systemic perspective, I did feel that close focus analysis with the key grouping would be more valuable to understand child participation. A broader stakeholder group can participate in future

research.

Based on my professional and research background, together with my experience in Grade R, I decided that I would select five Grade R teachers. I battled with the selection of children for the study. I initially wanted to include as many children as I could. However, my research objectives, the responses from the consent forms and the advice of the teacher determined how many children I finally included in the study. Fifteen children (eight boys and seven girls) participated in this study. They feature in the findings chapters, but other children that relate to them also feature. Consent for this type of participation was negotiated with the class teacher as the need arose.

3.3.1 Details of participants

The tables below provide details on the teacher and child participants in the study.

Table A: Details of teacher participants in the study

Name	Context	Race	Position	Qualification	Teaching Experience	Training Institution
Teacher A	One	Indian	Principal and Grade R teacher	Diploma in Education	Twenty years	Private Higher Education Institution
Teacher B	One	Coloured	Grade R teacher	Diploma in Education	Seventeen years	Private Higher Education Institution
Teacher C	Two	Coloured	Grade R teacher	Diploma in Education	Twenty one years in Grade R	Private Higher Education Institution
Teacher D	Two	Coloured	Grade R teacher	Diploma in Education	Twenty years in Grade R	Private Higher Education
Teacher E	Three	Coloured	Grade R teacher	Higher Diploma in Pre-primary Education	Fifteen years in Grade R	Private Higher Education Institution

Table B: Details of child participants in the study

Name	Context	Race	Gender	Age	Mother's Occupation	Father's Occupation
Iman	One	Coloured	Female	5-6	Cashier	Salesman
Nazeer	One	Indian	Male	5-6	Housewife	Plumber
Zaheer	One	Coloured	Male	5-6	Pharmacy assistant	Self employed
Kevin	One	Indian	Male	5-6	Nurse	Driver for a courier company
Kelly	One	Coloured	Female	5-6	Store manager	Electrician
Tarryn	One	Indian	Female	5-6	Teacher	Housewife
Noor	Two	Indian	Male	5-6	Grade R teacher	Electrician
Kaitlin	Two	Coloured (Malay)	Female	5-6	Housewife	Driver at the Municipality
Waseem	Two	Indian	Male	5-6	Gr 6 teacher	Works in a courier company
Husna	Two	Indian	Female	5-6	Housewife	Unknown
Kendal	Two	Coloured	Female	5-6	Working at	Professional Soccer player
Timothy	Two	Coloured	Male	5-6	Housewife	Works in the crematorium
Kirsten	Three	Coloured	Female	5-6	Housewife	Painter
Elias	Three	Indian	Male	5-6	Housewife	Salesman
Luke	Three	Coloured	Male	5-6	Housewife	Self employed

3.3.2 Context Details

In the section that follows I provide details of each of the contexts in which the Grade R sites/classes were located.

3.3.2.1 Context One

Context One was located in a middle class residential area known as Athlone in Cape Town. It attracted middle class learners who came from middle working class families. Context One was described as being a quintile five school, which is a school that is partly funded by the state.

The site was an independent/community-based site that was overseen by the WCED. It was not attached to a primary school and specialized in catering for children from ages 3 to 6 years. The enrolment was 149 learners. It catered for 3 Grade R classes. At the time of the study there were 31 learners in Teacher A's class, which comprised of 15 girls and 16 boys. In Teacher B's class there were also 31 learners, which comprised of 18 girls and 13 boys. At this school I decided to invite two Grade R teachers to participate in the study. The first Grade R teacher held a position as a principal and a Grade R teacher of the school, whilst the second Grade R teacher held the position of a Grade R teacher.

3.3.2.2 Context Two

Context Two was located in a lower socio-economic suburb in Heideveld in the Western Cape. This school fell within a quintile four rating although the deputy principal indicated that the school should fall under a lower rating, considering the low socio-economic backgrounds of the learners. The area was crime-ridden, as Teacher C explained to me:

Our school has experienced a few burglaries. Usually if we have a function on the one day then the next day you can expect a burglary. We cannot leave any equipment such as radios as they [the thieves] will come and steal those items. That is why we had to put in burglar guards.

Context Two formed part of a primary school. The school catered for learners from Grade R to Grade Seven. The total number of learners at the school was 783. The school had two

Grade R classes, which comprised of 30 learners each. In Teacher C's class there were 15 girls and 14 boys. In Teacher D's class there were 14 girls and 16 boys.

3.3.2.3. Context Three

Context Three was situated in the suburb of Rylands in Cape Town and formed part of a primary school which catered for learners from Grade R to Grade 7. The total number of learners in the school at the time of this study was 623. The school had only one Grade R class, which comprised of 35 learners. There were 35 learners in Teacher F's class, which comprised of 15 girls and 20 boys.

Under the previous departmental description and provisioning this context was described as affluent. The description remained the same under the management of the department. This context fell under a quintile five allocation, which implied that it was a school that catered for learners from affluent income groups. However, this was not the case. Although the school had a quintile five rating, it catered for learners from affluent homes but also accommodated learners from low to middle income groups.

3.4 Gaining entry into the field

Oliver (2010) alerts us to the fact that there needs to be secured collaboration in any study. Researchers cannot access any institution without having demonstrated that they are worthy as researchers and human beings and thus being afforded the opportunity to carry out their research (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2008). In this study I saw this as involving taking time to build trust with the teachers, principals and the children. In every school the principals felt honoured to participate in a Grade R PhD study for the first time. They were excited about the potential of this study to help their teachers to improve their practice.

Although the Grade R teachers were welcoming and were eager to accommodate the study, they needed clarity on all the aspects that would be covered by the research process. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2008) state that researchers need to give as much information as possible regarding the aims, nature and procedure of the research. Some teachers thought that the findings from this research would contribute to the development of materials required by the WCED to enhance practice in Grade R. I took time to explain the nature of my study and my activities as being solely associated with data collection towards a qualification

at that point.

Since my study involved children at the Grade R sites through observation, it was important to gain parental consent. I was aware that this was not the only requirement to work with the children. In order for children to understand they must know the voluntary nature of their participation and that is that they can withdraw from the study at any time that they wish, that they are under no pressure to comply and that they understand the benefits and risks of their participation (Alderson & Morrow, 2004). Robson (1993) maintains that when one is working with children, one has to be sensitive to the fact that children may experience difficulty with understanding the activities in the research process. I therefore explained my research activities to the children in ways that were consistent with their age and maturity. When I first met the children I explained who I was and my purpose for being in their classrooms. I found that stories and the use of gestures were helpful.

Once the study began I maintained a procedure that was common to all three sites. I informed the secretary, and sometimes the principal directly, of my arrival and departure. At times when I could not make a site visit I informed them telephonically.

When I began my study I felt that the teachers were very aware of the power that I brought into the classroom. As a university lecturer they saw me as someone that would give them an assessment of their lessons. I eased the power relations by having conversations with them which related to aspects outside their direct practice. This created a relationship of ease.

3.5 Data Collection

In qualitative research the researchers collect data in the contexts where the participants experience a problem that is under study. Oliver (2010) states that researchers collect data in relation to what they consider will be valid knowledge. Falk and Blumenreich (2005) state that research questions assist the researcher in making a choice of how data will be collected. Each piece of data needs to answer the research question. Data are often collected by the researchers themselves, and the types of data that are collected usually include observing behaviour and interviewing participants (De Vos et al., 2011).

For my study I used multiple methods of collecting data. Falk and Blumenreich (2005) note that it is important for researchers to use multi methods of data collection as the

triangulation that emerges from the data assists the researcher to see aspects from multiple perspectives, thus ensuring reliability and validity. I used semi-structured interviews, observations and video recordings of teachers' practice and children's meaning making efforts. I also wrote some field notes. The discussion that follows clarifies my engagement with the data collection techniques.

3.5.1 Using semi-structured interviews to explore teachers' beliefs

The nature of child participation in Grade R is tied to teachers' beliefs. In order to access teachers' beliefs, I decided to use semi-structured interviews. De Vos et al. (2011) state that interviewing is the predominant mode of collecting information in qualitative research as it is considered to create a social relationship between the participant and the researcher. The quality of the relationship is dependent on how creative the researcher is at understanding and managing the relationship (Monette, Sullivan & De Jong, 2005). Regarding this, Mukherji & Albon (2010) state that an interview is different from a questionnaire in that an interview can be interpersonal and there is always personal contact between the interviewer and the interviewee. With semi-structured interviews the authors note that flexibility of the research process makes greater demands on having good interpersonal relationships.

I felt that the time I took to get to know the teachers before the interviews helped to put them at ease. During the interview itself I paid attention to Neuman's (2000) concern about purpose in a social relationship. I was aware of the data I needed to collect, but also used some informal interactional exchanges. This allowed for non-restrictive accounts from the teachers.

At all the contexts the principals left the decisions to the Grade R teachers regarding where and at what times they would like the interviews to be conducted. Given the time constraints and the responsibilities involved, it was agreed that all interviews would take place once the children had been dismissed at the end of the school day. Teachers consented to doing the interviews in their classrooms.

The semi-structured interviews were designed with particular themes that related to Grade R teachers' beliefs about child participation. These themes included, but were not limited to, roots of beliefs in child participation, teaching and learning, and factors affecting child

participation. These themes had questions and prompts attached to them. The flexibility of semi-structured interviewing allowed me to create an understanding of how beliefs and threads of beliefs related to practice in teacher directed sessions.

Listening to the participant and taking down notes at the same time are both difficult and distracting (Mukherji & Albon, 2010). I therefore decided to use a dicta-phone to record the interviews and write up the transcripts at a later stage (Fielding & Thomas, 2008). To my disappointment, problems occurred when I almost reached the end of one interview. I had to redo some parts and, fortunately, the teacher was very understanding. From then on I decided to secure my data collection by audio and video-taping the interviews with Teachers B, C, D and E.

I experienced other challenges as well. Carrying out semi-structured interviews was a long drawn-out process. It proved to be exhausting and time consuming, especially since they were carried out at the end of the day. Some teachers found my questions difficult to answer. They would ask me to explain in simpler terms. I did this and also used examples and follow-up questions to foster better understanding. In terms of the language, I conversed with ease with all the teachers. Some of the teachers were English speaking and some were Afrikaans speaking. All agreed to be interviewed in English.

During the interviews there were times when I felt that my position as a researcher was influencing them in giving their answers. This alerted me to the power relations between the researcher and the researched. When I suspected that the power relations were strong, I said something light hearted or invited the teachers to give me examples. This helped to put them at ease and speak from their experiences.

In summary, the semi-structured interviews afforded me the opportunity to produce data about teachers' beliefs. They became an interactive path to obtain in-depth data. I also felt the need to share a little of myself as I put the teachers at ease. Despite the challenges, the semi-structured interviews enabled me to listen carefully to the teachers' narratives. It opened a window that helped to deepen my understanding of teacher beliefs, and also of my role as a researcher in a complex process.

3.5.2 Observing the Grade R teachers' practice through video recordings

Observation is understood to be one of the most important methods of collecting data for qualitative research. When researchers observe they make use of all five senses together with an observational instrument and recording it for scientific purposes (Angrosino, 2007; Mukherji & Albon, 2010). Observations are used when researchers want to understand or explain everyday behaviours (Rolfe, 2001).

My choice to use video recordings to collect data was informed by literature. Barbour (2009) observes that photographs and videos offer a novel way of researching topics that may be difficult to capture through the spoken word. O'Leary (2010) suggests that the use of cameras in social research ensures that the details of facts are recorded. Cameras can catch facts and processes that are too fast for the human eye. Moreover, data captured through video filming are not created by the researcher, but are existent in the context concerned (O'Leary, 2010).

Observations were undertaken in order to understand child participation broadly in the Grade R programme and then specifically during teacher directed practices. I had discussions with teachers, explaining the nature of activities for this segment of the research to them. I also had to answer teachers' questions around whether their lessons should be demonstration lessons, such as the ones in commercial videos. I assured the teachers that they did not have to do any window-dressing and would have to teach as they normally did without the presence of the camera.

In this study I opted to take on the role of non-participant observer during the video recording (O'Leary, 2010; Mukherji & Albon, 2010). I was physically present but I remained unobtrusive. I stuck to my role as a researcher and did not interfere with the daily practice of the teachers. The complete observer role was difficult to sustain because of the relationship that was developing between the participants, namely the children, teachers and myself. Labaree (2002) contends that dilemmas can occur when sharing relationships with participants, disclosing oneself to participants, and attempting to withdraw from the site. For example, there was an occasion when the teacher assistant was absent. Teacher A asked me to read a story to the Grade R learners as there had been many requests from the children for me to do so. The children were excited and promised to be disciplined. The excerpt below

shows this:

*"Will Ma'm Shaik please read us
A story? We promise not to
jump in front of Ben Ten's
camera..."*

3.5.3 Opening the window to the children's world

One of the key challenges I faced in this study was to use a participatory paradigm for research with children. I had to revisit the theoretical positions of children and the implications for research before I could proceed.

I began by looking at the traditional view of children as adults-in-the making, as explained in the previous chapter. From this perspective children are incomplete beings *en route* to adulthood. From this perspective they lacked voice and were seen as objects rather than subjects. This would have meant that I would analyse their voices and actions from a perspective that did not value them as active meaning makers. This is counter-productive to an equalising research where ethics plays a role and power is redistributed amongst all participants in research (Pascal & Bertram, 2009).

This led me to look at newer perspectives that offered more in terms of child participation. From sociological understandings (as noted in the previous chapter) it is possible to position children as subjects and participants in research. This dimension of child participation, however, brings its own challenges. For example, does research with children as subjects and participants differ from research with adults positioned in the same way? There is evidence to suggest that research with children and adults should not differ (Punch, 2004). Differences of opinion of research with children and adults may stem from adult perceptions of children's competencies and reliability together with adults' beliefs of their advanced knowledge in comparison to that of children (Punch, 2004).

There are, however, certain aspects that need attention when young children are involved in research that attempt to disable power relations. Pascal and Bertram (2009) contend that it is important to give young children not only one, but many platforms from which they can express themselves. Listening with all their senses, researchers then need to determine what

is being communicated. This listening should be followed by an intense process of reflection to find the truth behind the expression. Understanding the real meaning behind children's expressions is perhaps a challenge, but the rewards are rich.

The above communicates the importance of promoting symmetrical dialogue with children when they are involved in research. In this study I attempted a participatory approach to involving children in the study. I began video-taping the children for a few sessions at different times of the day. After a few days of taping I decided it would be a good idea to have them talk about what they had done in a small segment of their activities. This proved to be challenging and unfruitful.

The children were unresponsive even when they were asked to tell me a story about what they were doing. When I asked questions I received yes and no responses. Upon reflection I feel that the activity in the segment may have lost meaning for the children. Additionally, I may have come across as too "teacherly" in my efforts to understand what they were doing. This could have been too cognitively demanding for the children. I could have also experimented with different story starters to encourage dialogue.

My instincts, however, told me to explore another opportunity to produce data with the children. Microphones were placed on the children who participated in this study in order to capture what they said, and videos were used to capture their actions. I was interested to know how children, through their voices and actions, showed their power and agency. The selected children were videoed during the school day for a period of three days. The reasoning behind this was that teachers indicated that Mondays and Fridays were busy days for both the teachers and learners. The use of videos has been employed creatively in research involving young children. Cook and Hess (2007) claim that putting children in front of cameras is an engaging activity for children. Moreover, using videos is a tangible way of involving young children as opposed to direct interviewing. Photographs and videos enable the researcher to return to a topic at a later date as they act as a visual prompt for children (Cook & Hess, 2007).

Once the videoing logistics were in place, I moved around the class. My engagement with

children was heart- warming. Most referred to me as "Ma'm Shaik". Some children were very chatty and I felt as though they had known me for ages. During the video recording some children also grew fond of the cameraman, Ben Ten.

The children took delight in showing me their work. They also expected responses, such as compliments and hugs. Considering that this research involved the nature of child participation in Grade R, listening to children became important to me. I became privy to stories about imaginary characters, personal experiences and the trials and tribulations the children experienced. As I deepened my understanding of the children as subjects, participants and as people in Grade R, I became more sensitive to their meaning making and the nature of their participation.

3.6 Data Analysis

Data analysis can be understood as a form of transformation of what we finally hope to use as evidence. This involves a change of understanding of data from one form to the other. This transformation occurs as qualitative data are collected and are processed into clear, understandable, insightful and trustworthy original analyses (Gibbs, 2007). Data provide both the evidence and the clues, but it is the analytic procedures that move you closer to provide answers to the research questions. The analytic procedures refer to sorting the data and organizing and reducing them to more manageable pieces in order to make meaning of the data (Schwandt, 2007).

For data analysis I adapted ideas from Miles and Huberman (1984). Before analyzing the pre-recorded data, I had all the data transcribed. The data that were transcribed by myself as well as by the departmental secretary included the interviews with the teachers, observations through videos of the teachers' practice, and observations through videos of the children's meaning making. My short-hand field notes provided me with accounts of what I had seen, heard and experienced whilst in the field. This also contributed to me making sense of the interviews, as I analyzed the observed practices of the teachers and the children's voices and actions. I found that analysing the data was not a straightforward process. It was a messy and time consuming process, as De Vos et al., (2011) concur.

My task of analysing the data became a little easier once I had linked all the bits and pieces by means of coding to my research questions. For the chapter on teachers' beliefs, I read each of the transcripts line by line to identify units of meaning, which are also called codes. Falk and Blumenreich (2005) argue that coding is a systematic process of sorting out the data. Coding helps to ensure that findings are based on evidence and not perceptions, feelings or thoughts (Falk & Blumenreich, 2005). This was helpful as a first step to making sense of the research question: "What are teacher beliefs about child participation in Grade R?" I clustered the units of meaning around the sub-questions that guided the semi structured interviews. The sub-questions functioned as sub-themes, with expanded ideas to understand teacher beliefs. The following sub-themes feature in the chapter on teacher beliefs:

- roots of teacher beliefs
- teacher training and child participation
- teachers' definitions of child participation
- teachers' beliefs about learning
- teachers' beliefs about supporting learning
- factors about beliefs.

The factors about beliefs on child participation related to beliefs about language and culture, beliefs about gender and child participation, beliefs about socio-economic factors and child participation, beliefs about race and class, and beliefs about physical infrastructure and child participation.

When analyzing the data for teachers' practice, I looked at all the segments that focused on teacher-directed practice. I was particularly interested in the commonalities in each of the segments related to teacher directed sessions for child participation. Linking these to my research question ("How does teacher directed practice shape the nature of child participation in Grade R?"), I studied the segments and found that they were falling into two themes - enabling and constraining child participation. I then took the selected segments and arranged them to show weak and strong levels of child participation when teacher- directed practice was in action.

In analyzing the children's voices and actions, I played the videos repeatedly in order to capture the children's meaning. I was sensitive to the units of meaning that related to children's agency. I then clustered them and arrived at the themes: 'children negotiating spaces of control', 'children's imaginary spaces of control', and 'invoking the teacher's authority'.

3.7 Rendering my study credible

An important focus on attaining empirical rigour is that of validity. Validity mirrors the qualities of truthfulness, authenticity, accuracy, genuineness and soundness (Salkind, 2006). Both validity and reliability in qualitative research use criteria such as credibility, confirmability, consistency and applicability to make statements about the quality of the research. The researcher needs to use various persuasions to get the audience to accept that the study is one of note (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

There were several actions taken to secure validity and reliability for this study. At the outset I spent considerable time in the field. Over a long period I was able to get to know the teachers and children through interviews, observations and video recording. This allowed me to get a better sense of the nature of child participation. The audio taping, video recording and field notes allowed for a fuller picture of child participation to emerge. As confirmed by literature, I consider multiple data sources as a strength that validates a study.

It is through researcher reflexivity that I showed the workings in this study. Reflexivity attempts to make explicit the power relations and the exercise of power in the research process (Reid, Tom & Frisby, 2006) Reflexivity involves critical reflection which surfaces on a number of levels. Reflection involves identifying power relationships and their effects on the research process. It also allows for ethical judgements that frame the research process and marks the limits of shared values and political interests. Moreover, reflexivity involves the accountability of the knowledge that is produced (Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2002). In this study I had to alert myself to the ways in which adult power influenced the children. I had to reflect on the power that the children themselves possessed to generate understandings of how they were agents of their own participation. The details in the research process show this. I also up-fronted my challenges on how I attempted to address these.

It was difficult for me to make sense of the data on my own. Early in my study I joined a doctoral cohort group where I became sensitive to key concepts in my study. Subsequently I adopted two critical friends. They were sufficiently close to me and could maintain objectivity in examining the data I presented to them. I spent time discussing the data and inviting them to share their views and opinions with me. This gave me an opportunity to be exposed to alternate ways of looking at my data. My supervisor also served as a critical friend with greater insight into my study than my other critical friends. She guided me by asking questions that required critical thinking. I sometimes rose to the challenge but battled with the difference between descriptions and meaning-making. She constantly challenged me by asking "so what?" This partly assisted me in moving beyond description.

During the time of my study my institution also became more research focused. As such I was given the opportunity to present papers at research seminars. I was lucky to be exposed to both experienced and inexperienced researchers in presentation sessions. Whilst the former asked the close focused questions on my data, the latter provided me with key ideas on how accessible my interpretations were. Both groupings helped me to understand my research better and to challenge my thinking. I also joined a writers' retreat where I used a chapter to develop a journal article. This experience helped me to interrogate my data in different ways in order to answer my research questions. I began to develop a greater understanding of the rigors required to convince the reader of my claims.

3.8 Ethical Considerations

In any research, ethics play a pivotal role in determining what is proper and improper during the research process. As such, ethics can be referred to as the moral principles which offer rules and behavioural expectations about the most appropriate behaviour towards respondents (De Vos et al., 2011).

An important, fundamental rule is to ensure that no participant involved in the research process is faced with any type of harm, be it physical or emotional (Babbie & Mouton, 2001). Emotional harm to participants can be more difficult to predict than physical discomfort and

emotional harm can have stronger consequences than physical harm. During the research process participation should be voluntary and no participant should be forced to participate against his or her will (Babbie & Mouton, 2001).

It is the duty of the researcher to ensure that he or she obtains informed consent from all parties involved in the research process. As part of informed consent, researchers must ensure that all relevant and adequate information is included in the consent forms. Such information should include the nature of the research, the expected duration of the participants' involvement, the procedures that will be followed during the investigation, the possible advantages and disadvantages and the dangers to which participants may be exposed. The credibility of the researcher should also be included.

After my research proposal had been approved, I applied to the University of KwaZulu-Natal for ethical clearance, which was granted. Many institutions have ethic committees which serve to protect the interests of a number of parties involved in the research (Oliver, 2010). Ethics committees try to protect the participants of the research so that they are not asked to do anything that might cause them harm. Ethics committees also try to protect the researchers themselves so that they do not put their professional reputations at risk. Finally, if an institution funds a research project, then the professional reputation of an institution may be at risk of harm if it is considered to support inappropriate research (Oliver, 2010).

Prior to the collection of data the Department of Education, the principals, the teachers and the parents (on behalf of their children) were given consent forms and full details of the study (see Appendices section). All the participants were assured that they and their institutions would participate anonymously and that confidentiality would be maintained at all times. All participants were also informed that their participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw from the study at any time that they so wished without experiencing any disadvantage.

With regard to ethical considerations for children, this issue was covered in earlier sections of this chapter. When research is carried out with children, relationships between the researcher and the children can become complicated and this was one of the challenges that were faced in this study. Children are more vulnerable when there are unequal power

relationships between adults and children in the research process. As such, unequal power relationships can exist between age, status, competency and experience (Einarsdottir, 2007).

Coady (2001) cautions researchers to be mindful of using children as victims of research. There is usually an imbalance of power between the researcher and the researched that is prevalent in all stages of the research process (Waldron, 2006). Research involving young children should also be deemed meaningful in the context of children's lives. Children are considered to be the most vulnerable group of society and it is for this reason that researchers need to ensure that their work is purposeful and meaningful to children's lives (Waldron, 2006).

One of the most important ethical issues in research is that of consent from parents and assent from children. There is general consensus in the research community that where children are involved parental consent must be sought. In addition to parents giving consent, children have to assent to the research activities. They need information in keeping with their maturity to give assent. Children should have the right to accept or deny their participation in the research process (Alderson, 2000).

In this study both parental consent and assent from the children were obtained. With regard to assent the children were respected as people who were knowledgeable about their life world and who could provide insight into how they experienced activities that were planned for them. Waldron (2006) argues that it is important that children understand the purpose of the research as well as the role of the researcher and the roles of the participants. I used child friendly ways to explain my role and the nature of the research activities as the research process.

I also allowed children to ask me questions bearing in mind their need for information. Some were curious about my presence and the exact nature of what I would do with the things I was recording and writing. I kept my explanations brief to meet their need for information. I used stories and gestures to communicate my intention. I respected their body language in terms of what it told me regarding their willingness to participate. Additionally, I explained to them that they could withdraw from the research at any time they so wished. Waldron (2006) cautions researchers to guard against children that want to please adults in the

research process because they feel that their reluctance to participate or withdraw might create negative consequences for them. I was especially cautious in this regard and ensured that the children did not feel compelled to participate if they were not happy to do so.

3.9 Conclusion

This chapter focused on the methodological path I took to generate data to understand the nature of child participation in Grade R. The qualitative research approach with a case study design proved valuable, as I was able to work with the subjectivity which teachers and the children brought to the research process. The use of multiple methods of data collection, such as interviews, observations and video recording of both the teachers' practice and the children's voices and actions, made it possible to gain a fuller picture of child participation. This study was not without its challenges. My reflexivity, which was promoted by the qualitative research approach allowed me to engage with issues and challenges as I researched child participation.

In the next three chapters I provide the findings that emanated from the data produced. In Chapter Four I present the findings on how teacher beliefs shaped child participation in the Grade R classes that I attended. In Chapter Five I show how teachers, through teacher directed practice, enabled and/or restricted child participation in Grade R. Before the concluding chapter I present the powerful position of children as meaning makers who exercise their agency which results in high levels of child participation.

CHAPTER FOUR

TEACHERS' BELIEFS ON CHILD PARTICIPATION

4.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to address the research question, "What do teachers' beliefs suggest about child participation in Grade R?" This study notes the idea that child participation is not the same in all parts of the world, but that it is rooted in particular contexts. For this reason I sought to find answers to my question in a context-bounded way.

In order to present a holistic view of teachers' beliefs, I began by examining their roots. I encouraged teachers to share their personal beliefs from memories with regard to children, childhood and participation. This chapter shows that the notions of child participation ideas are rooted in teachers' memories.

This is followed by examining teacher training and the philosophy, approach and practice that the teachers were exposed to. I did this so that it can give ideas of where the training emphasis was and what messages it held for child participation. This exploration also helped me to see what the differences were between training and implementing the curriculum relevant at the time of the study.

Teachers' definition of child participation is explored. Their beliefs are noted within the contexts of the NCS and the pressures they experienced to deliver according to learning outcomes and assessment standards. I also found it important to examine teachers' beliefs on learning and supporting of learning to expand perspectives on child participation.

Since this study took into account context, I also examine the factors that complicate child participation in South Africa. The discussion of the influence of the categories of difference such as language, culture, and gender provides a more authentic picture of the realities of Grade R teaching and learning in South Africa. Additionally, I look at how ideas of power are rooted in teachers' beliefs and how power enables or restricts child participation.

In order to build my arguments in this chapter, I draw on ideas of belief systems from Rokeach (1960), Perry (1970), Brownlee, Berthelsen and Boulton-Lewis (2007), and Brownlee, Berthelsen, Dunbar, Boulton-Lewis and Mc Gahey (2008). With the exception of Brownlee, Berthelsen and Boulton-Lewis (2007), the others worked with ideas on beliefs outside early

childhood. However, their ideas were helpful in locating Grade R teachers' beliefs about child participation. I also draw on ideas from Hart (1997), Lansdown (2004) and the agency view of the child to make sense of the teachers' beliefs. Approaching the analyses that are reported in this chapter in this way, I was able to make sense of a complex area of study.

4.2 Roots of teachers' beliefs on child participation

Teachers' beliefs about child participation are not standardised and universal. They are socially, culturally and contextually constructed. The context in which teachers grow up and their childhood memories have a bearing on their ideas on childhood, images of children and their notions of child participation. This theme places the Grade R teachers' beliefs in the context of their life experiences. In Chapter Two I noted that this type of concern is associated with Rokeach's (1960; 1976) notion of primitive beliefs. He argues that this type of belief system is developed during childhood within the family and social context. They are important in helping individuals to develop formative ideas of self and group identity.

I felt that it was important to contextualise the participating teachers' beliefs of child participation for the purposes of the study. I therefore explored their memories of childhood. I acknowledge that when we recall things from our past it might be romanticised and the full story might not be as authentic as we might like. Nonetheless, I found it important to have insight into the teachers' personal locations with regard to child participation.

Teacher B came from a family of teachers. In narrating her childhood experiences of how she participated as a child it was evident that she had been brought up to "stick to the rules". This happened because of the notion that "an adult is always right". She equated this type of participation in family and social life to the context of raising a respectable child. She noted that this way of being brought up created boundaries but did allow for sharing of opinions. She lamented the fact that the boundaries between adults and children are more blurred and child control is on the increase in current times. She felt that teachers' authority is weakened due to child disrespect and their stronger control over adults. The excerpt that follows illustrates this.

We were allowed to have opinions but just to have that respect and I find that today a lot of

our little ones have lost respect because they see teachers as more of a friend. I even watch them with their own parents and there I'm also picking up that the child has actually got a little bit more control. I do feel that they do need boundaries and that is why, like I said I've been teaching for about fifteen, sixteen years and if I think back to my first grade R class and I compare it currently, there is a vast difference.

Teacher C recalled how her childhood excluded her from being "part of any decision making". In her interactions with her grandmother with whom she lived, she noted how "I wouldn't dare question things. As a child you had to listen". She described herself as the "middle child". With regard to recognition by her grandmother she said, "They don't really see you". Teacher C grew up in a home with four sisters with whom she interacted freely and this enabled her to participate in family life. When she was asked about how her personal childhood influenced her thinking about child participation, she noted how restrictive participation in her personal upbringing had motivated her to create a more enabling space for the children in her class.

Well, I never went to crèche, I was reared by my grandmother. So I did not really participate in anything you know when you grow up with grandmother you just do that and that. You are looking after the grandmother. So I am trying to give the children an opportunity. That is why I try in my class to encourage them to participate... Most children are reared by grandmothers but I try to open ways for participation.

Teacher E was the younger of two children in the family. She felt that her parents were gender biased. Her participation in activities were restricted because she was a girl and needed to be protected by her older brother. As a child she believed that she was "a quiet

child". She enjoyed observing and watching people do things. She recalled being an unquestioning child with the exception of one incident. The following excerpt shows this:

We were told what to do without asking questions. I was not a rebellious child and I would not really question my mother. I did what I was told. It was only when during Matric when I wanted to do as my brother did I questioned them. When I would be told not to go clubbing I would say, "But I want to".

She also noted how her childhood experiences influenced her practice in Grade R. This was especially in relation to gender and affording children broad play experiences. At first she replicated the gender segregation that she had been exposed to. Her questioning attitude allowed her to bring about changes in the way she allowed boys and girls to participate.

When I started teaching Grade R I had girls only playing at the fantasy area and boys only in the block area. So I thought wait a minute I'm doing the same thing that my mother did to me... Why am I separating these children by gender? So I stopped...boys and girls are free to go where they like. We would need a dad in the fantasy area...So it influenced me in a positive way.

Teacher A came from a big extended family. She had three sisters. She was brought up to embrace the Indian culture. She noted how she was "separated from the adults". She also recalled that children had to know their place and "didn't really interact with adults". Her parents did not play games with her. She remembered definite roles of her father being the breadwinner and her mother seeing to the household needs. In this context she noted that "there wasn't much interaction" and children had to "keep quiet". In raising her own children she encouraged them to ask questions "respectfully".

Teacher D was also raised to be a quiet child. Adults noted visible presence but did not

encourage interactions with children. Listening to an adult was noted as essential for a child. Resistance meant corporal punishment.

We grew up in a time when children were told to keep quiet and you know they always used to say you know that saying, (what's it...) "a child should be seen and not heard"... I was not given a lot of opportunity I think to just say what was on my mind. At times I will think, "No, I can't take this man" and you know I was a little girl, and obviously if you did not listen to what Daddy said, the belt came out, and you were giving a hiding.

The narration of teachers' primitive beliefs showed that the context in which they had grown up gave them messages and experiences about how to be children and how adults treated children. The image of the *becoming* child - one that is quiet, obedient, respectable and in need of control - was valued when the teachers were growing up. These traditional notions of who children were and how they should be treated restricted their participation as children. Children were separated from adults and were given more instructions than opportunities to participate in active ways in social life.

The above tells us that the teachers were exposed to dualistic beliefs. Perry (1970) contends that when this type of belief is at play, it creates binaries between those that are in authority and those that are not. The adult-child binary makes the adults the authority that exercises strong control over children who they believe are in need of protection, care and socialisation into the values upheld by the family and society.

The discussion in this section draws attention to the dehumanising and humanising effects of power from a generational perspective (Freire, 1970). The teachers were growing up in a time when children's rights were not strongly entrenched in South African society. The family was also a private space where enforcement of children's rights was complicated, which is true even in current times. The teachers were subjected to constraining practices for child participation where they lacked voice. The dimension of children as passive, respectable and

obedient was dominant. As children, the teachers had to stick to rules, had decisions made for them, and they experienced biased behaviour and a lack of interaction with adults. These dehumanising acts were not totally constraining as they made the oppressed (children) gain ideas of alternate ways of doing childhood. Foucault (1977) draws attention to how power cannot only be negative as it produces knowledge where the subject displays active knowing. As children, the teachers were building their contents of their beliefs through interpretive frames of references which circulated as the dominant discourse of being a child.

The study revealed that participating teachers' notions of child participation influenced their thinking and actions as Grade R teachers. Teacher A highlighted the importance of boundaries between adult and child and the need for adult control of children. Teacher E noted how she contested rigid gender ideas from her upbringing to create more enabling experiences for children in her class. Teacher C wanted to open up opportunities for child participation, especially for those that were growing up with grandmothers. The latter finding is a key concern taking into account that a considerable number of children in South Africa are raised by grandmothers instead of a biological parent or parents. There is a push against the constraining effects of adults limiting child participation.

4.3 Teacher training and child participation

In analysing the training that Grade R teachers had received, it was evident that child-centred approaches and developmentally appropriate practices featured in the teacher's talk. This was consistent with the old pre-primary teacher training approach promoted by non-governmental organisations for practitioners in South Africa.

Teacher A had the following to say about ideas of teaching children in Grade R:

Ours was never a case where the children sat on the mat and listened to the teacher. Ours was a case where you asked open-ended questions to encourage children to think...I think it's once they got to Grade One they reverted back to just sitting there and...like sponges having to soak up.

But it is in pre-primary where the children were encouraged to participate by asking questions, by making contributions if they saw something, to comment on it...also when it came to their drawings, their pictures or whatever they created they actually speak about it.

Teacher E spoke about how child choice and freedom of children to make decisions were made explicit in her training. The excerpt below notes this:

For example, we were taught to give children a choice and provide for all sorts of levels. You need to provide children with what they need for painting for instance and give them a choice to either sit flat or sit in any way they want. Like if they are painting they would like to either stand or sit on the table. You should give children choice. The children have the freedom to sit flat on the mat or lie down on their tummy while drawing and doing other things. So there is no restriction there.

Teacher C noted how her training sharpened her ideas on child involvement. In her training she developed ideas on opportunities of active child participation:

When we were trained ...you know the child needs to be involved at all times. You need to give the child opportunities for investigation, exploration, hmm, participation. That's the way we trained.

Teacher B shared ideas on how her training influenced her practice to deal with children in a developmentally appropriate way:

*Whatever I present to the children it needs to be
age appropriate and if there is a child who is
struggling I need to make it a little less
challenging so that the child also experiences
success...*

The ideas the teachers shared above can be aligned to the power of derived beliefs (Rokeach, 1960) which are beliefs learned from others. These beliefs are also related to epistemological beliefs which give ideas on the nature of knowing and knowledge (Hofer & Pintrich, 1997). The child-centred approach and developmentally appropriate practice gained through training gave the teachers ideas about knowing children and what to do with them. The teachers shared ideas of a constructivist nature of learning where children are encouraged to actively participate in their learning.

Relativistic beliefs are also associated with what the teachers shared about their ideas on working with children that they gained from their training. In this position Brownlee, Berthelsen & Boulton-Lewis (2007) note that teachers that have relativistic beliefs will conceive teaching and learning as facilitating rather than transmitting.

There is an expectation that teachers trained in a particular approach will implement their practice according to this approach. But we know that practice is complex and the curriculum context changes. This makes new demands on teachers and creates the need for renewal of practice. It was therefore necessary to look at what exactly teachers understood by child participation.

4.4 Teachers' defining child participation

The participating teachers were asked to share directly their beliefs on child participation as an indication of their thinking, understanding of their practices, and their positioning as teachers in the early years. It was interesting to note that when the teachers were asked about child participation, none of them made reference to the participatory rights of children as noted in Articles 12 and 13 in the UNCRC (1989). This can be attributed to the fact that

although South Africa is a signatory to the Convention, little time has been devoted to the aspect of participatory rights as a philosophy, a value and a framework on how it should be understood in education and specifically for education in the early years. The NCS has implicit information about child participation which would require teachers to read between the lines.

When the teachers were asked if child participation was reflected in the NCS document, various responses were received. Teacher A felt that some information on child participation appeared in the NCS but was not sure:

Look, I think in there, if I am not mistaken they encourage the sharing and that of all cultures and informing...Look I really don't think so...

Teacher C referred to the literacy outcomes of listening and speaking to make a case for the reflection of child participation in the NCS:

Teacher C: Most of my participation and things comes from speaking. Uhm let's see other one talks about listening hey. I think there could be more...Most of my... you know participation and things comes from speaking. ...I think listening also because they are participating...because usually when we ask them questions they have to answer them it means they have to be listening to me and be able to understand.

Teacher D believed that the NCS affirmed child participation:

Teacher D: ... I think in the policy document they actually want child participation. I think ...nowadays the policy moves away from you being the dominant person doing all the ...I think they want the children to participate more in the new policies that we're getting now.

The teachers' responses were varied. This is understandable considering that at the time of the study the focus was on developing a structured and practical approach for the Foundation Phase to curb the dismal performance of these children in the systemic evaluation at the end of Grade 3. It could be argued that child participation was more a priority in terms of achievement to better performance in the learning outcomes and assessment standards in the NCS. The intentions of the curriculum required specific skills. It expected that this would impact on teachers' notions of child participation.

From each teacher's response it was evident that child participation was approached from the notion of a child participating in a teacher-initiated environment. Some type of child involvement in activities was considered to be an important indicator of child participation. We get a sense of child participation being judged from children's commitment and activity in situations created by the teacher. It is possible that beliefs of this nature were forthcoming because the play sessions in the Grade R classes were largely non-directive, except where the children played games with rules. The teachers' control was tight to ensure that children participated in ways that developed their understanding of the games.

Teacher B presented a tight control view of child participation. She recognised that participation is associated with active involvement. However, her reference to this involvement was in relation to the activities she set out and not around activities where children controlled the agenda. She believed that children's attention span would not allow them to participate in a focused way. The developmental maturity of some children in relation to their concentration provided her with a framework to shape her practice. Her belief on child participation is shared below:

They need to be actively involved in whichever activity you've set out. There are some that have a bit of a problem with concentrating for long periods of time so with those children you just need to try and rein them in again. Try and get their attention and then encourage them to participate.

The above excerpt shows us that Teacher B valued children's active involvement but she also showed us that she regarded herself as a figure of authority in the classroom and her

expression of dominant power was very evident.

Teacher A held more affirming beliefs on children's capabilities. She noted that they were "not sponges just absorbing" information. She had also alluded to this previously. She viewed child participation as taking place through active cognitive and social involvement through interactions. She used examples of how they are able to ask questions to become part of the learning experience and participate in discussions. In so doing, she valued children as thinking beings who can find a sense of belonging in the learning experience through small opportunities to influence. She did show commitment to "having them actually participate". The excerpt below illustrates this:

The child actively has to participate in whatever happens in the class. Okay. ...that they don't sit back and are like sponges just absorbing because the best way for them to learn is actually through asking questions and by participating in what discussion or whatever activity you are having for them to actually participate.

It was evident that child participation was not only believed to be associated with cognitive and social development. Teacher D believed that child participation referred to physical involvement and, after probing her views, also cognitive involvement. The notion of the active child was brought to the fore in contrast to passive behaviour such as sitting and listening. Teacher A believed that child participation was opposite to "sitting there and receiving". She viewed this behaviour counter-productive to being part of activities learning. Child participation for her meant that children were doing something. Those with passive behaviours were interpreted as non-participatory children.

Uhm it obviously, to me it means, the child being actually physically involved you know, in something not just merely sitting there and receiving but really being part. So to me participation means the child actually physically being involved in

something.

Thus far, teachers' beliefs on child participation showed that there are multi-dimensional ways in which children take part. Teacher D also held the belief that child participation is closely associated with a stimulus that enables a child to take part. She combined examples of cognitive, physical and behavioural postures to articulate her belief on child participation. For her, child participation in terms of passive behaviours does not necessarily preclude learning. This view was also shared by Teacher C. The observant and sensitive teacher can pick up the many forms of child participation. The excerpts below show this:

Teacher D: To me it means anything that makes children take part, anything that they participate in, sometimes by taking part, listening or just observing. Sometimes a child is asking questions and being part of the learning process, some might just be sitting quietly but you can tell they are part of the process, they are learning something.

Teacher C: It's not always taking part, it's sometimes maybe just sitting and listening or um... just to be, I mean if they in a group and they look at you or they are aware of what is happening. Even if they are not really talking but I feel then they are still participating.

There was also evidence of child participation being associated with high energy, motivational drive and thoughtful behaviour. Teacher E believed that child participation is made up of both active and passive behaviours that children display. Her belief is captured in the excerpt below:

Teacher E: To me it means those children who are involved, they are interested, they are confident, they are eager to learn, they come to school, asking questions and participating in each activity. Yes you get those who first observe and watch before they get started.

There was some recognition that children should express themselves in a way that is different from mainstream views and as independent beings. However, this was in tension with the belief of young children's vulnerability and them needing protection. Teacher B noted this in relation to school rules and the need to regulate children's behaviour:

I think they should be able to be free to have an opinion and to differ. The school rules, the way we've set it up is just so that it prevents them from getting hurt because at this age they are very much into uhm the fighting games and what they're seeing on television and they actually acting it out and I don't think that they fully realize the impact of whatever they're going to be doing or how they're playing.

The analysis of the teachers' beliefs on child participation showed that they did take into account active learning and taking part. Their beliefs were varied and therefore aligned to the concept of multiplistic beliefs (Perry, 1970). Their views were coloured by opinions and experiences. The children were given opportunities to participate in activities that affected them and they were given some opportunities for expression of their views.

What was missing in the teachers' beliefs was any type of involvement of children in decision making processes. It could be argued that the evaluative part of their beliefs was missing. There was evidence that the teachers did make attempts to tune in to the children's intention through recognising body language and motivation. However, this was not consistent with the practice of high participation by the children. For example, earlier on we saw how the teachers had been exposed to listening to adults in their childhood. In this section it is clear that they regarded listening as a skill that was expected from the children but not from the teacher for deeper engagement with children's concerns. Children must learn from adults; but adults learning from children was not prioritised. Listening to children will only feature as a priority if teachers develop a sense of consciousness. Freire (1970) believes that the latter is necessary to create awareness that something needs to be changed. This is particularly important if classrooms are to be democratic and inclusive.

It was evident that the teachers omitted to focus on how children can be actively involved in planning and evaluations of activities in Grade R. For this to happen, children's intentions and actions need to be interpreted, trusted and developed with support. The consultative dimension of child participation as noted by Lansdown (2004) was not forthcoming as the teachers' ideas of joint involvement and joint ownership were weak. This stemmed from the purpose of the Grade R programme - as driven by the curriculum - to give thrust to learning that enhances knowledge and skills rather than participatory learning that takes into account children's needs and interests. However, it was clear that their initial training had exposed the teachers to child-centred ideas.

South African studies in the early years have shown that young children have capabilities which make them agents who can participate in more sophisticated ways than adults normally think that they can. (Ebrahim, 2011; Linington, Excell & Murriss, 2011; Schnieder, 2013). Young children can and do give their own opinions, assumptions and share possibilities with other children and adults. Their power to influence is there but needs to be taken up and harnessed by teachers.

When I examined each of the teachers' beliefs on child participation is, it was evident that there was participation of children at the lower rungs. However, within Hart's (1997) notion of participation, the teachers' beliefs fell more within the practice of manipulation. When this happens, teachers use children's voices more to carry the message they want and to confirm that curriculum learning is taking place rather than as a tool to actualise the child's world.

It could also be argued that although references were made to active involvement and expression of children's views, this was tokenistic (Hart, 1997). In my observations I noted that there were opportunities for the children to participate and have a small voice, but this remained at the margins. In such situations the *deficit* rather than the *asset* image of the child is at play. Hence, it could be argued that the dualistic belief of child participation dominated in the sites under study.

4.5 Teachers' beliefs about learning

How children participate is dependent on the learning environment that the teachers set up for them. The latter is influenced partly by their beliefs and conceptions of how children learn. In the study the teachers' beliefs about learning showed their acceptance of the constructivist views of learning. Play also featured as a key approach to allow for children's active participation in learning. Teacher A had a strong belief in the Piagetian view of learning by experience and by the senses. The stages of cognitive development namely progressing from the concrete to the abstract were believed to be important for children to learn and gain sensory experiences. It was believed that the engagement of the children with the concrete stimuli had the potential to give children opportunities to participate actively in learning activities. The excerpt below illustrates this:

Teacher A...they learn through experiences and through concrete experiences. So if I want to teach them about a particular animal or something, okay some of the animals is very difficult to bring in but if we do something such as pets we are fortunate we've got things like a rabbit, we've got budgies and we've got tortoises so we teach them through concrete things. I think it is important initially concrete and then we progress even in terms of shapes when we do something like shapes... You give them the concrete thing first, three dimensional and then two dimensional and then abstract. That is the most important way and the main way they learn anyway is through their senses at this stage anyway.

In analysing Teacher A's belief on learning, there are implications for child participation. The ages and stages paradigm for understanding children's capabilities in early childhood has come under critical scrutiny by the reconceptualists (Cannella, 1997; Viruru, 2001), those

working within sociology of childhood (James & Prout, 1997; Mayall, 2004) and Penn (2005), who works with issues of children in the majority world. Piaget's theory casts children as lacking in rationality and therefore capabilities for logical ways of doing things. Hence, the concrete is regarded as being very important to support children's learning and participation. Another criticism is that children's cognitive development is viewed as a linear and hierarchical process.

The critics of Piaget note that children's cognitive development is complex. It does not happen in a straight line. Children's social experiences of language, communication and instruction according to their needs and background are more significant in the development of their thinking, learning and participation (Wood, 2008). It is important to consider this in South Africa where children grow up in diverse settings that make different demands on their capabilities and how they participate in their lives. When teachers use the stage theory of children's cognitive development narrowly, they run the risk of limiting children's participation.

Teacher C also believed that the senses are important in children's learning. She noted how children's exposure in home and school environments had a part to play in child participation. She believed that asking children questions and communicating with them would afford them opportunities to participate. The way in which children observe their surroundings was also valued in the learning process and related to child participation:

I think children learn by seeing things and um being exposed to things at home and in the classroom and by asking them questions and communicating with them then you get them to participate... I think there is quite a few that just sometimes observe and sometimes there is those that love to participate and always participate, but there is quite a bit of them that like to just observe what's happening.

An analysis of Teacher C's belief on learning and participation showed recognition of how the environments shape what children will know, think and do. Once again the skill of observation was recognised as part of child participation. This aspect draws attention to the

importance of sensitive and responsive teachers who can connect with children's intentions and invite them to participate.

Play featured as an important aspect of child participation. Teacher D and B saw play as arenas for learning. Teacher D further noted that it was the entry point for learning. Child participation in terms of involvement related to acting out what the children were exposed to and then using it to their advantage to expand their learning. Teacher B viewed interactions in play as indicators of what teachers could expect when learning involved child participation. The excerpts below show this:

Teacher D: ... they learn through play first which is the most important thing right. Uhm, obviously they also learn through, obviously a lot of copying, imitating the adult, uhm they... through asking, I think asking, curious, I mean the more curious the child is, I think the more the child would actually learn because obviously he is gonna, he is asking much more questions and obviously in that way, he is broadening his horizons on learning much more...just to explore and to uhm, uhm, you know to play and explore and investigate because that is the only way that they are going to learn.

Teacher B: Uhm the way that they socialise as well. Whether it be verbally or just the normal type of interaction, playing together. Okay they learn through play, they need to experience things physically, uhm they also learn, well from what is known to the unknown. Uhm. Yeah.

Teacher E included a variety of activities associated with learning, which included the participation of children. Her notions of learning and participation are captured below:

Grade R children mostly learn through interacting with others in the classroom, through taking and participating in class, participating in everything that happens around them, they learn by discovering things, through basic playing in a non-structured way, I would say, they copy others and their teacher as you work along with them, repetition of rhymes and songs that helps children who have speech problems. It's also done in a nice fun atmosphere. They also learn with touch, feel, hearing, listening and speaking and role modeling...

Teacher E drew on ideas from constructivism in both an individual and social sense in her beliefs. When she talked about interactions with others, she gave us an indication that learning involves a relationship and it involves taking part in the learning processes.

In examining all the teacher's beliefs on children's learning and participation, the notion of the active child became clearer. For these types of beliefs to become practical action it would mean that the teachers would have to make "physical and mental room" (Berthelsen, Brownlee & Johnson, 2009) for participatory learning to take place. Perry (1970) argues for a more relativistic orientation to beliefs. This means that the teachers themselves should acknowledge that they are not only constructors of meaning, but that they should also be co-constructors to facilitate children's meaning making.

The above will include making inter-subjective agreements with the child and allowing for a lot of give and take. Being immersed in this perspective will certainly mean that Grade R teachers will have to be knowledgeable about participatory learning and the awareness of it. It would require a mind-shift of learning as acquisition of knowledge and skill only to participatory learning. The teachers' beliefs showed potential for this to happen. The teachers' beliefs also showed potential for participatory learning to take place. In addition to this, the question of how much power should be accorded to children during participatory learning became an important issue. The teachers' beliefs showed that they valued the idea of a constructivist curriculum where both teachers and children co-construct meaning

through their learning. However, the power differentials that reside in the interplay between children's learning and the teachers' practices remain in question because of a prescriptive curriculum. Also, the idea of children 'owning' activities that are supported by adults indicates a power transfer from teacher to children (Formosinho & Araujo, 2011).

4.6 Teachers' beliefs on supporting children's learning for child participation

The teachers' beliefs on child participation suggested their awareness of the importance of paying attention to the learning environment. This is important to give us an idea of the conditions that set in motion their beliefs on child participation. For children to actively take up learning, express their views and have a say in matters that concern them and to display their intentions to make Grade R classes their own, the environment needs to offer opportunities for interactions, activities, problem solving and decision making.

Teacher C showed recognition that activities and materials need to be forthcoming for children's participation. The importance of concrete examples and stimuli was once more emphasised for "better" participation and holding of children's interest. Little reference was made to using children's experiences and understandings as connectors to their learning experiences. The connectors for children's participation had more to do with outside stimuli than with the child itself. The excerpt below shows this:

I try to make the environment, learning environment always work for all of them to participate. For instance, I use concrete examples like a picture and make it more interesting to them and through that they can learn and participate better. Talking to them without concrete things does not really make the lesson interesting enough for them to participate.

There was also evidence that showed support for child participation to go beyond just paying attention to the physical stimuli for learning. Teacher A and D both believed that a supportive learning environment for child participation needs to take into account the

characteristics of children and then to develop a support strategy for their participation. Teacher A spoke about confident and shy children in terms of degrees of participation. Her observations and sensitivity to children's needs led her to offer support to meet their needs. The excerpt below provides an example of this:

If we are in the front garden for instance you would find the ones who lack confidence when they go onto the climbing frame. Okay because it's high they find it intimidating. So you would go with them and assist them in that, to overcome that fear and initially you do it a few times with them and then you gradually encourage them to do it on their own. Okay a lot of encouragement. A lot of encouragement and a lot of support and a lot of praise as well. Okay. A lot of positive re-inforcement.

4.7 Beliefs of factors affecting child participation

Teachers in the study believed that one of the key factors affecting child participation is language. Language is an important tool for children to communicate their intentions. In South Africa we have a complex language policy which includes 11 official languages. This ambitious policy is difficult to implement. Teachers do not receive adequate support for teaching children in the African languages and for teaching English as a second language. It is therefore not surprising that the teachers in the study saw language as a barrier to how children will participate in school learning. Teacher A's response shows this:

...I have a little boy who is Xhosa speaking and it's definitely affected his development. This is now the fourth term and he is voluntarily giving news. Um...I think that he initially didn't have the vocabulary nor the confidence to participate.

The teachers believed that language, culture and home background complicated the ways in

which children participated. Teachers C's and D's responses illustrate this:

Teacher C: ...I find with the Xhosa children in the class it is a bit difficult to say because they also have the language barrier. I do not know if they not participating because it is part of their culture to sit and let the adult speak or because they really don't understand what I am saying but they really do not have the vocabulary to really express what they are feeling...

Teacher D: Language is a barrier I think but some, I think maybe the language but sometimes they also don't get the opportunity at home, their social background...its also cultural. I know in the black culture there is a lot of this thing, respect for elders you know, and I was sitting now and thinking is it that the reason why I find that black children don't you know uhm, uhm, uhm, over expressive like the coloured children jump up, you know, and believe me I find that you know, I would say "Khalo, take out the bin for me," But before Khalo can get the bin, somebody else has come. But I never find that the black children will actually go in there and do it.

Taking into account the inequalities in South African society, it is not surprising that the teachers believed that socio-economic conditions and class would affect the nature of child participation in Grade R classes. The excerpt below illustrates Teacher A's belief on how child participation is affected by home circumstances, opportunities and the economic situation of parents:

I think it [the home] affects their

confidence. The ones who come through a more affluent home um...are more exposed to the media...in terms of even the computer and other types of media going to the library and that. The others are not and the parents themselves might be more educated and as a result there might be discussion about things around the dinner table or if there is something on the T. V there is discussion around it. Whereas the ones who are not educated you find that the children don't participate as confidently because they don't have the knowledge or the information to participate in a discussion...because of economics parents go and work you know. They don't spend as much time with their children as they should or they don't see the importance and value spending time with their children and doing things to stimulate the children at home.

Teacher B alluded to the social problems in broken homes and how these impact on child participation. She believed that children will act out what they are exposed to. How they express themselves is affected by their backgrounds. Their interactions are affected:

I think also more and more we are finding that children are coming from broken homes or single parent families and they do tend to be a little, either they act out. That is the way that some of them would express themselves and you would find the ones that are more quiet and withdrawn ...you have to really try and draw that child out so that they can interact.

In South Africa, it must be remembered that poverty does have an effect on how children

participate. Poverty not only impacts on material poverty, but it also impacts on the social nature of the way children participate (Leatte, 2007). As such, many poor children are exposed to home environments where female parents/siblings or grandmothers are the head of overburdened households. Many of the adult carers are illiterate. These may be contributing factors which influence the nature of child participation in Grade R. In some instances children are limited in their participation efforts because of the effects of adult power over them.

Teachers believed that gender was another factor that affected child participation. We have already seen the effects of gender on child participation from teacher memories. Teachers' beliefs ranged from believing that gender does not play a role in how children participate in some activities to it being a factor affecting participation. Teacher A felt that all children participated in the same way in creative activities but differed in construction activities. She attributed this difference to gender socialisation in the home:

Teacher A: Okay in terms of creative ways I think they all participate in the same way, approaching the art activities they are all fine. In terms of construction toys I feel my boys love the construction toys and they're quite creative with it whereas the girls, they need encouragement to go and do that.

Researcher: Why is that?

Teacher A ... I don't know if its uh... the way they've been socialised at home. You know we buy dolls for girls and cars for boys.

Teacher D believed that the traditional gender categories of boy and girl are important to the children. They act out narrow roles of girls and boys. She intervened to broaden their participation beyond the gender stereotypes that they came in with:

I find the girls are more free to participate where sometimes I feel the boys

are...sometimes boys have a thing of that is girls' stuff you can't do that because it's for girls only. That is what I find and I mean it cost a lot of me because now you see them playing because I told them doesn't your daddy make food, doesn't your...I mean. And now I get them but when they started they didn't want to because they were saying, "Teacher the girl's can't play with the cars because it is for the boys".

Teacher D believed there is a difference in how boys and girls participate. She felt that their participation is not absolute in terms of their sex but rather fluid, depending on their personalities.

Teacher B...I think they participate a little differently and I think also, not just, I think boys are a little more competitive than the girls so they tend to be a little bit more boisterous but then I also have to take into account the children's personalities...I might have a boy who is extremely quiet and a girl that is boisterous. So I think it is a combination of personality and gender.

With regard to gender and child participation, the teachers' beliefs drew attention to the fact that at a very young age children learn what they should be like and do as boys and girls. Institutional forces such as the school, family and society play a major role in constituting maleness and femaleness as children must learn that they must be identifiable through their own gender characteristics (Yelland, 2002). Corsaro (1997) states that traditional development theories have placed strong emphasis on biological and cognitive development, both of which focus on gender development that is seen as a process of individual change. Hence this focus is on children's developmental paths and there is no focus on children's active construction of their social worlds (Corsaro, 1997). In a study carried out by Davies (1989), she shows how children can actively construct their gender identities. She argues that there can be a definite move away from conforming to traditional functionalist notions of

socialization and gender (Davies, 1989).

It also became evident in the study that teachers believed that over and above the social and cultural issues affecting child participation, physical infrastructure created barriers to child participation. One of the major problems faced in Grade R is overcrowding which leads to a lack of space for children to explore their environment. The design of the buildings was found to be more geared towards formal school learning. This was especially true of the indoor environment. Teacher A believed that the available space limited the possibilities for the children and for her to set up the learning environment for active child participation:

Space is a problem. Outdoor it isn't really a problem. There is sufficient space outdoor but in the class itself. Okay it is a bit restrictive. Your fantasy area, like ours is very narrow or even our book area, the space is very small. So that in itself limits. Also some of the things are a bit noisy, some of the activities so you need to have a bit of a balance there where you tell them okay because it obviously impacts on the other children who are busy.

In analysing the factors that affected the nature of child participation in the study, various complexities were illuminated when the categories of differences in the South African context were examined. It concurred with the notion that the nature of child participation is not a universal phenomenon but rather socially constructed in a specific context (Ebrahim & Francis, 2009). The study revealed how language, race, culture, socio-economic circumstances, class, gender and physical infrastructure work to shape teachers' beliefs on the nature of child participation.

Although we saw that language, race, culture, socio-economic circumstances, class, gender and physical infrastructure shaped teachers' beliefs about child participation, the question of how these teachers enabled these children from different cultural backgrounds to have power also became important in determining what their beliefs were. Research shows that

early childhood teachers are not adequately prepared to teach children who come from diverse backgrounds. As such, teachers subscribe to the dominant culture and values to guide their practices, thus perceiving these values as universal (Corsaro, 2003). Early childhood teachers also relate differently to children from different ethnic backgrounds and have different expectations of children because of their social backgrounds (Robinson & Diaz, 2006). The way in which boys and girls are related to also differs, implying that these gender stereotypes are based on traditional stereotypes (Mac Naughton, 2000). It could be argued that teachers' beliefs about language, race, culture, socio-economic circumstances, class, gender and physical infrastructure serve as drivers for how teachers hold or share power with children.

4.8 Conclusion

In this chapter the aim was to examine teachers' beliefs with a view to make sense of how child participation was understood in Grade R. I took a more holistic way of answering my research question. The findings of this study showed that teachers' beliefs on child participation were complex, messy and context-bound. Their beliefs did not fall neatly into one category. They were multidimensional - i.e., primitive, dualistic, derived, multiplistic and relative. The teachers drew from different sources to shape the thinking and doing of child participation. The findings reported in this chapter also show how teachers' beliefs were influenced by issues of background, tradition, power and voice.

This chapter showed that when examining teachers' beliefs on child participation, it is helpful to explore past experiences of being a child and childhood. This helps to make sense of where teachers would draw their thinking from in order to shape their roles and identities as Grade R teachers.

An examination of teachers' training experiences showed how a particular philosophy that is grounded in child-centred practice had possibilities for affirming high levels of child participation. This starting point was found to be in strong contrast with their curriculum demands and it impacted on how they afforded opportunities for child participation.

Teachers' definitions of child participation were informed by the current context in which

they had to perform. The findings showed how they made referrals to teacher initiated opportunities to define child participation. Although active learning was evident and did afford opportunities for children to participate in activities, there was no reference to children participating in decision making. Ideas of co-construction and joint involvement were weak. This could be attributed to the demand for tight teacher control and notions stemming from the dualistic image of adults in power and children as objects. The interplay between teachers' classroom practices and children's actions showed that teachers held the dominant power and thus opportunities for greater participation by children were lost.

This study notes that child participation in a diverse country like South Africa is affected by the categories of difference. The latter was noted as language, race, culture, socio-economic circumstances, class, gender and physical infrastructure. These factors do influence the nature of child participation. The next chapter presents the findings and discussions on teacher practice in Grade R.

CHAPTER FIVE

CHILD PARTICIPATION IN TEACHER DIRECTED PRACTICE

5.1. Introduction

In studies on educational beliefs and practice, it is common to examine the relationship between teachers' beliefs and practices. It is also noted in literature that the correlation between beliefs and practice is influenced by contextual factors that affect the nature of teachers' practice.

The time I spent in the Grade R classes and the gap in knowledge on the nature of child participation convinced me to examine practices for child participation in the context of teacher directed activities. This was due to the dominance of this approach in the Grade R sites I studied. The play sessions were hands-off sessions but had quite a bit of tight teacher control when instructions were aimed at behaviour and games with rules. Teachers' beliefs feature in this chapter in an integrated and thematic way.

In this chapter the aim is to answer the research question, "How does teacher directed practice shape the nature of child participation?" This question is significant when taking into account how the NCS as a standards-based curriculum impacts on teachers and children in Grade R. In teacher directed practices, it is expected that the controls of teachers to reach the outcomes of learning are tight. However, little is known about the nuances of child participation that emerge during this type of practice in the South African context. This chapter attempts to broaden understanding of the above. It is also aimed at examining the type of systemic changes that are required for more enabling practices for child participation.

In order to make sense of practice with regard to child participation, I draw on ideas from Hart's (1997) ladder of participation, Lansdown's (2004) degrees of participation, the agency view of the child and Vygotsky's (1978) ideas on scaffolding, and Rogoff's (1990) ideas on guided participation. These ideas helped me to create an understanding of child participation in the context of teachers having power and control.

The discussion in this chapter is organised around two themes, namely teachers restricting child participation and teachers enabling child participation. These themes show that the ways in which teachers positioned themselves shaped the nature of children's participation. Where teachers took strong control over shaping the learning outcomes through a focus on learning as an acquisition of knowledge and skills, children's participation as agents was compromised. Teachers took up prescriptive teaching roles and, as such, teaching became associated with a transmissive process of learning where passive modes of child participation were evident. In these instances teachers played the roles of tellers, instructors and transmitters of knowledge, skills and values.

Whilst the above aspects were evident, there were also weaker levels of teacher directed practice which enabled more active forms of child participation. Where this happened there was some degree of flexibility between the teachers and children to create shared understandings and to learn from each other. Greater child participation in teacher directed activities became evident when teachers played the role of co-constructors of meaning. In such instances they attempted to develop shared understanding and saw themselves to some degree as learners of children's attempts to make meaning of their life world.

5.2 Teachers restricting child participation

When teachers positioned themselves as transmitters of knowledge and skills, it was clear that the opposite held true for the position of children. As receivers in the learning situation, the children were given little leeway to make their own inputs to learning.

The transmitter and receiver form of communication is associated with direct instruction. As a teaching technique it can be valuable to build children's knowledge and their symbolic thoughts and to cater for their need for information. The danger of over using direct instruction is likely to result in the teacher being active and children being passive recipients of learning. The one-way communication is framed around a "chalk and talk" method or what is known as the "jug and mug" approach to practice in the early years (Schweinhart, 1997).

Since teachers are guided by the curriculum, they also take on roles that are seen to be civic

rather than social in nature (Formosinho & Araujo, 2011). Teachers who assume civic roles legitimize the curriculum so strongly that they forego their social roles and thus they become transmitters and deliverers of the curriculum. It could be argued that teachers are forced by the pressures of the curriculum to become sub-oppressors. In their need to ensure that they survive by subscribing to the pressures of the curriculum, they suffer from a duality and find it difficult to make choices between being spectators or actors, between following prescriptions or having choices, between speaking out or being silent, and being castrated in their power to create and recreate and to transform the world (Freire, 1970).

South African history shows that the transmissive modes of teaching are mostly associated with Bantu Education which was premised on rote learning. In democratic South Africa we are seeking more affirming ways to respect young children's participatory rights, especially since early childhood is seen as a vehicle for social transformation and democratic citizenship development (SA Department of Education, 2001b).

In observing teacher directed sessions and watching the video clips that were taken in the Grade R classes, it was clear that teachers relied on the traditional teaching technique of direct instruction to impart knowledge and skills in the formal curriculum. From my observations, this technique was mostly made up of telling children what to do, guiding them to contain their thinking, and insisting that they constrain bodily movement to conform to the demands of a task. In all of this there was little room for children to explore the processes of learning. Teacher directed activities largely happened in time set aside for teaching of knowledge and skills for literacy, numeracy and life skills.

Teacher C's belief on child participation showed that she was aware of children participating even if they were "just sitting and listening". She also said that children learn by "seeing things" and she valued asking children questions and communicating with them. The example below shows Teacher C's role as a teller and instructor who framed communicating with the children in a particular way.

*Teacher C: What colours do you see on
this stop sign?*

Kaitlin: Red and white

Teacher C: Do you know what shape this sign is? What shape? Remember when we talk about shape we are not looking at colour. Do you know what shape this sign is?

Children: Diamond

Teacher C: Remember we did the diamond in our basic concepts book. Is this a diamond?

Children together: No. It looks like a circle.

Teacher C: It almost looks like a circle but is it a circle.

Children together: No

Teacher C: Why can't it be a circle? If it's a circle what must it have?

Children: Curve lines. It mustn't have long lines and points.

Teacher C: But Reza says it must almost look like a circle right. This shape we call...listen to the big word I'm going to tell you know. This shape is called an octagon. This is called an octagon. What is it called?

Children: Octagon.

Teacher C: Now an octagon is a shape that has eight sides. Eight sides. So let's count how many sides we see here. Let's see if I am right. Right we are gonna start there.

Children together: One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight.

Teacher C: Am I right?

Children together: You are right teacher.

Another example from Teacher C's class during theme teaching also reinforces the teacher's role as a director of learning where she took centre stage in controlling learning:

*Teacher C: Right, these two men here.
Have you seen these two men? Children:
Yes by the robots.*

*Teacher C: Now these two men are my
best friends and do you know what their
names are?*

Children remain quiet

*Teacher C: This one's name is Ronnie. Do
you remember I told you before?*

*This one is Ronnie Red and that is my
other friend whose name is Graham Green
and what does Graham Green say to you?*

*Kaitlin: Come my friend, you can come it is
your time.*

*Teacher C: Ronnie Red says. Stop please
my friend.*

*Teacher C: It says please stop. Don't walk
over the red. They are our friends because
they help us. That is what friends do for
one another, isn't it so.*

Children: Yes.

*Teacher C: Friends help each other and
these two guys are our friends because
Ronnie Red says to you listen stop, don't
walk over the road because when we walk
over that road now the cars are going to
knock you over.*

In her beliefs on learning and participation, Teacher C valued the use of concrete aids to help

her children learn. For example, she used concrete aids such as traffic signs and toys to help children to participate. In both the examples the teacher attempted to increase the children's knowledge of shapes and traffic lights through telling - letting the children know about these aspects through concrete aids. Whilst participation of the children occurred, the opportunities were very limited. Within the formal didactic context the control by the teacher was tight. Children were given closed questions which elicited one word responses that relied on recall of information.

Theobald and Kultti (2012) state that most questions asked in educational settings are closed or known information questions. The teacher in such contexts knows the answers to such questions but asks them anyway. These types of exchanges restrict sustained interactions between teacher and learners and as a result do not contribute to high quality participation experiences.

In the second example the children were silent and gave short responses which were within the expectations of the teacher. There were scarce opportunities for the children to share what they thought and to express knowledge about the topics from their experiences. Mac Naughton and Williams (2004) claim that when teachers talk to children about what they [the children] know, it gives the teacher an opportunity to understand the meanings that children give to the topic or activity being undertaken. The end of the first example is quite telling: "You are right, teacher". In this example everything was directed to children becoming increasingly agreeable to the teacher's agenda and expectations.

When child participation is weak, it is bound to affect the child's attention. Boredom sets in and children become disengaged and unresponsive. Bhana (2002) and Ebrahim (2007) note that young children will use in-between spaces to assert their own agency. Some children are knowledgeable on how to mainstream their activities by keeping out of the gaze of teachers. It was not uncommon in the study to find children that were disengaged. I noticed how they were interfering with each other, playing with their buttons, fiddling with their shoe laces and looking outdoors during formal teacher directed activities. These moments suggested that the children did not participate in the official learning experience but took the time to focus on other aspects that they prioritised for themselves.

The focus on procedural knowledge was very strong when the teachers took on the role of a teller and instructor. The teachers made the decisions on what was to be learnt and the procedure that had to be followed to gain the facts and information. The teachers controlled the actions of the children to help them to become knowledgeable on how to arrive at the facts. Few opportunities for experimentation, risk taking and sharing of thought processes were allowed. "Copying and imitating" and listening to adults were included as part of Teacher B's belief on how children learn. The example below occurred during a maths activity conducted by Teacher B and it shows how the children were given steps to arrive at the answer.

Teacher B: Right Kevin. Slower Kevin, slower. You need to touch every one so you need to go slower. Your finger can't move so fast across the beads. Right.

Kevin: One, two, three, four five, six, seven.

Teacher B: So what number did you have Kevin?

Kevin: Number six

Teacher B: Number six. And how many beads did you take out?

Kevin: Seven.

Teacher B: So do you think they match?

Kevin: No

Teacher B: What do you think you need to do?

Kevin: Take one away.

Teacher B: You must take one away and what is going to happen if you take one away?

Kevin: It's going to be six.

Teacher B: Okay, let's see. Count.

Kevin: One, two, three, four five, six.

Teacher B: So does it match now?

Kevin: Yes

Teacher B: Thank you Kevin

Teacher B's belief on child participation also showed her concern for control due to children's lack of attention. Getting children's attention and encouraging them to participate in the lesson were important in her efforts to make children participate. In the example above the teacher restricted Kevin's body movement and speed. The procedure required Kevin to touch count slowly, attend to what he was doing, and to arrive at the answer. Kevin was given some freedom to express his view when the teacher asked, "What do you *think* you need to do?" But this required specific answers. Whilst child participation was invited, it occurred within the framing of the learning that needed to take place within the teacher's definition. The teacher enabled Kevin to share his thoughts so that she could make meaning of the processes in his thought patterns to do the correct actions. This was in keeping with direct instruction which promotes prescriptive teaching.

Children's agency is often compromised when the teacher positions herself as one who holds the answers by virtue of having the adult status of the more knowledgeable other. We know that the teacher needs to structure, model and assist the children to find a solution to solve problems. However, Rogoff (1990) would argue that there needs to be more co-construction in the learning processes which affords children more ownership.

When children and adults co-construct meaning together, teachers and adults both become co-creators of knowledge and teachers refrain from being transmitters of knowledge (Dahlberg & Moss 2005). Lansdown (2004) states that participation requires that there should be information sharing and dialogue between adults and children that are based on mutual respect between both parties.

From what was presented thus far, it is evident that talk plays an important part in child participation. Research has shown that talk is an influencing factor that contributes to children's knowledge and talk is also used as a measure of quality in settings in the early

years (Sheridan & Pramling Samuelsson, 2001; Sylva, Melhuish, Sammons, Siraj Blatchford & Taggart as cited by Theobald & Kultti, 2012). From a socio-cultural perspective, talk is seen as a mediating factor that is important to children's learning. Talk forms part of speech which is a cultural tool that is used in mediated action in order to gain a form of action (Daniels, 2001). Language as a psychological tool serves to master children's mental processes (Vygotsky, 1978). The characteristics of rich talk are often marked by sustained shared thinking between both learners and teachers; in addition, children's understanding of the topic will increase. Talk is the medium through which participation can be made possible.

During morning ring in the Grade R classes, whole class activities were undertaken. These sessions were designed to enable language development. Teachers used this platform to model good practices in talking, listening and sharing. Below we see how Teacher D used talk as a medium for participation of the children. However, this was disrupted by a misdemeanour:

Teacher D: Right now today we are going to have visitors in our class hey. We are going to the toilet and when we come back we will start right. Who knows what day it is today?

Children: Monday

Teacher D: And whose day is on Monday?

Children: Strawberries [Strawberries]

Teacher D: So Strawberries, I would like you to stand in the line for me please.

Husna: Teacher, Aziz did swear the children out.

Teacher D: No Aziz do you think that was nice. This afternoon when you go home what are you going to say to those children?

Aziz: Sorry.

*Teacher D: You gonna say sorry to them
hey hmm. It's not very nice hey. We don't
speak like that.*

*Eden: Teacher and that other boy, Tanya's
brother he say "jy ek gaan jou moer" for
Terry.*

*Teacher D: Who? Tanya's brother. Okay
we will sort him out.*

The example above shows how tight controls of the teacher took place amongst multiple concerns that affected the nature of child participation. The teacher's agenda to allocate work to "Strawberries" was disrupted by Aziz swearing. When this was brought to the attention of the teacher, the agenda was then shifted. Aziz was reprimanded. The teacher was alerted to another incident of swearing by another child. In this example the children shifted the teacher's agenda by drawing her attention to unacceptable talk. So even though the teacher was in control, the children actively shifted the agenda through drawing attention to something they knew the teacher was bound to react to.

Although the children shifted the agenda, the final answers to resolve problems rested with the teacher. Such moments in teacher directed activities do raise questions of multi voicedness of child participants in the learning situation. More could have been achieved if there had been space for negotiation, orchestration and struggle between participants (Daniels, 2001). The children could have been invited to analyse the situation and come up with solutions.

The above could have been achieved if the co-construction of the situation had taken place by problem posing and problem solving. In this study it was found that teachers offered quick solutions based on their ideas and strengths of problem solving. This was usually one sided. As such, teachers limited opportunities for problem posing to extend learners' understanding and their cognitive capacities. The following example shows a restrictive practice which constrained possibilities for co-construction of meaning. The children quickly learnt about

who was the expert during an art activity in Teacher B's class, even though this teacher had constructivist understandings of how children learn and participate in activities. It could have been expected that she would draw on this for a creative activity.

Teacher B: Alright then at the paint table today we are going to do some printing. All you gonna need to do is you are going to have to take the shapes. Push it onto the sponge and then put it on the page and you can put as many shapes as you can.

Teacher B: Right and you try and fill your page but what must you not forget to do?

Mark: Write your name.

Mark: Teacher can you help us make our own pictures with the shapes?

Teacher B: Yes but we first need to just use shapes to make designs. Today we must complete just stamping with the shapes and we can do that together.

At first glance the example shows some qualities of guided participation. The teacher took the lead to build bridges that assisted children in understanding what actions to take and how to act in a new situation. She communicated in a way in which children were assisted to complete a task. However, the children did not feel confident to complete the pictures on their own. This is an indication of the reliance on the teacher for answers and skill. It could be argued that when this happens, it restricts how children think about how they can participate and who is best at achieving the correctness of a task. In this example the teacher readily agreed to assist, but without going outside her agenda.

The teacher did not fully explore the fact that the children in this scenario could be meaning makers. Hence, the opportunities for children to negotiate meaning with others were curtailed (Morrison, 1995). Within a socio-cultural perspective, when children experience and interact with the concrete world they are able to make sense of the interaction and they are

thus in a position to form their own personal understandings and knowledge about the world as they physically experience it (Arthur, Beecher, Dockett, Farmer & Death, 1996). In order to operationalise this view, teachers would need to be sensitive to children's meaning making.

In concluding this theme, it must be remembered that the tight controls by the teacher could be understood in the context of the pressure that teachers were going through in order to meet the demands made by the NCS for term by term delivery of outcomes. It could be argued that this pressure made the teachers choose teaching techniques where they felt that they would have a greater chance of directing learning towards particular outcomes. This observation partly supports or contradicts their beliefs.

This study showed that implementing a direct instruction approach where teacher telling was strong, compromised the view of learning as participation as the children experienced lost opportunities to interact, co-construct and make their voices heard. Schweinhart (1997) rings warning bells about early education programmes that over use direct instruction. He argues that whilst they may contribute to children's short term advantage in academic achievement, the long term advantage of their social and emotional achievement may be compromised.

5.3 Teachers' enabling of child participation

Since teaching and learning are complex activities, there was also evidence of teachers attempting to create spaces for children to share their thoughts in a way that did not await prescribed answers or expectations according to the teachers' agendas. More constructivist than instructivist practices were forthcoming. Where this happened, teachers' questions were more open-ended. They featured as *Why do you say...? If you had to...? What do you think...?* (These were coupled with teacher interest to listen to the children). Where teachers allowed this to happen, higher demands were made on the children's cognitive, creative, imaginative and language skills. They were also given opportunities to share their thoughts and ideas. In contrast to the example provided earlier on, a more affirming environment for child participation emerged in a discussion on traffic signs by Teacher D during theme teaching on another day.

Teacher D: So this is a very important sign. Why do you think this sign Kelly is so important?

Eden: Because we need a robot to help us with the cars.

Teacher D: But why do you think this sign is so important. Anybody why do you think this sign is so important. Yes Tasha.

Tasha: It's a stop sign.

Teacher D: But now why do we need stop signs on the road. Yes Azaad why do we need stop signs?

Azaad: For the cars to make it stop.

Teacher D: What would happen if the cars don't stop?

Azaad: Accidents. They bump.

Teacher D: They bump yes. Just imagine if there is no stop signs and everybody can just ride. You can ride so, you can ride so... what do you think would happen?

Azaad: Accidents

Teacher D: There will be lots and lots of accidents and that is why we have the stop sign on the road.

In the example above, Teacher D created a good opening for the children to share what they knew, thought, felt or believed. The teacher let go of some control as an expert and allowed the children some space to share their knowledge. She was persistent with the question, "Why do you think this sign is so important?" She did not confirm or refute Kelly's answer but went on to get others thinking about the stop sign. After Tasha had answered, she invited the children to consider the need for stop signs. This was followed by children being encouraged to think of the consequences of cars not stopping at the sign. The teacher encouraged imaginative thinking. Teacher control in

this example was a little more flexible. There is evidence of some co-construction of meaning. For Vygotsky, cognitive development occurs in situations where the child's problem solving is guided by an adult who assists the child in finding a solution to the problem (Rogoff, 1990). From Hart's notions of participation a teacher's willingness to elicit child participation is affirming for the children. The example below shows how the teacher elicited child participation through probing and asking children to make their thinking explicit.

Teacher D: And what can you tell me about Aliyyah's piece of wool? Yes Mubashir.

Mubashir: It's long

Teacher D: She's got a long piece and Janice what can you tell me about Ishaq's one?

Janice: It's short.

Teacher D: Its short yes. How do we know the one is long and the one is short?

Janice: Because Aliyyah's one is long and Ishaq's one is short.

Teacher D: But how... ?

Children: We can see

Teacher D: But what else can we do?

Teacher D: Yes, we can measure. How are we going to measure?

Teacher D: Yes Mubashir? We are going to put it next to each other. We put it together. Look everybody at how it is put together. After I put it together I can see the difference between long and short.

From Vygotsky (1978) we learn that when learning is most effective, there is evidence of children working within their zone of proximal development. This concept suggests that

children can only perform independently when they are given opportunity to perform more competently with assistance (Vygotsky, 1978). In the following section I show how, when scaffolding is an enabling factor, the zone of proximal development becomes an important factor for participatory learning. In this example the teacher, together with some learners, scaffolded the learning as she helped the learners to create their own pictures using shapes.

Teacher A: What shape is this?

Iman: A square.

Teacher A: This is not a square.

Zaheer: Rectangle

Teacher A: How do we know that it is a rectangle?

Iman: Because it's got straight lines.

Teacher A: How many straight lines?

Zaheer: Four.

Teacher A: Four straight lines.

Teacher A: Let's count straight lines.

Iman: One, two, three, four.

Teacher A: Now what can you tell me about these straight lines? Yes Talia

Zaheer: Two long lines and two short lines.

Teacher A: Two long lines. One, two and two short lines.

Teacher A: Yes and somebody said here about points. Yes and how many points does it have?

Iman: Four.

Teacher A: Four points. Count the points.

Children together: One, two, three, four.

Teacher A: What did I say we can also call

these points?

Children together: Corners

Teacher A: Corners. But what is that other word that starts with an "a". Children together: Four angles.

Teacher A: Four angles. Very good. We also call them angles. It's got four angles. What do you think I can use this for in my person? For his what?

Children together: For his neck.

Teacher A: For his neck. Very good. For his neck.

Teacher A: Right I have made a neck. Right what does this person still need?

Children together: A body.

Teacher A: A body. What shape do you think I can use for his body?

Iman: A square.

Iman: ...because all the lines are the same size.

Teacher A: All the lines are the same size.

In the interaction there were varying degrees of opportunities to participate. We still see closed questions but there was also an opportunity to challenge the children with the question "How do we know...?" The complexity of the outcome to be achieved and the motivation of the teacher to take control and give some space for children to control the learning activity affected the nature of child participation. Rogoff's (2003) notion of guided participation which is structuring during direct participation also closely resonates with the idea of enabling scaffolding during participation. As teachers and children collaborate in structuring activities, there is close interaction as both parties participate. Adults in such situations adjust prompts and other necessary strategies in order to assist and help children according to their development (Rogoff,

2003).

Teachers in the study opened up pathways to interaction through encouraging children to share their personal experiences. During the early morning discussion, some teachers in the study assisted the children to become more vocal about issues that were of concern to the children. When this happened, teachers promoted and extended opportunities for talk where children took the lead. The following example in Teacher B's class illustrates this. Kevin was the expert in an experience and Teacher B respected his way of knowing and provided him with a challenge.

Teacher B: Kevin, have you got any news for me?

Kevin: I had pudding at home.

Teacher B: What type of pudding did you have?

Kevin: We had two.

Teacher B: So did you help mum to make the pudding?

Kevin: No, I don't like the kitchen.

Teacher B: Why not?

Kevin: Kitchen is for sisters and mummies.

Teacher B: Okay that's interesting. So if we are going to bake in this class, will you help me?

Kevin: Well, maybe with my friends.

In the example Teacher B used a questioning technique that allowed sustained shared understanding and thinking to take place. Kevin shared his experience of having pudding. Upon probing, the teacher gained an understanding of Kevin not being active in the making of the pudding. The exchange revealed Kevin's understanding of gender roles. The discourse of "Kitchen is for sisters and mummies" revealed Kevin's categorising of male and female jobs. The teacher was then provocative. As a female,

she invited Kevin to join her in a baking activity. Kevin's response tells us that he took a safe route - baking with the teacher but also in the company of his [male] friends.

This example shows how mediation is used in a participatory way to bring meaning to the understandings of different players in learning situations (Daniels, 2001). Children do not develop cognitive capacities purely on their own, but they develop these cognitive capacities as they interact with other individuals who serve as mediators and thus mediate the learning (Rogoff, 1990). Rogoff (1990) states that as learners and teachers communicate, children are able to make connections between what is already known to the children and what they need to learn in order to handle a new situation. Participation offers children valuable opportunities to improve their social and communication skills and their social and learning skills are also enhanced (Willow, 2002). Through direct participation, children can genuinely develop a sense of competence and responsibility (Hart, 1997).

When teachers share the space of learning and take a more interactive approach, then boundary crossing is possible (Anning, Cullen & Fler, 2009). Boundary crossing refers to the importance of sharing expertise. Children can share their knowledge with teachers and then enter a field that they are unfamiliar with. When this happens they can react with defensive accounts. They are likely to encounter opposing viewpoints. For group work, members will not be prepared to work in a group and therefore it becomes challenging to make decisions (Anning, Cullen & Fler, 2009). All of these encounters strengthen children's participation and help them to broaden their horizons of learning.

Where teachers in the study were active listeners to children's concerns and activities, they were able to develop solutions to problems with the children. In these instances teachers used images of children as competent and having capabilities to contribute to teaching and learning. In my observations and from the video recordings, this was best achieved through problem solving and co-construction of solutions. The example below shows how, in the outdoors area (a place where teachers were more flexible), Teacher D achieved sense making, understanding, interpretation, problem posing and problem solving.

Teacher D: And what are you making?

Timothy: I made a no smoking sign for no smoking in the house.

Teacher D: For who is that now?

Timothy: My sister smokes in the house.

Teacher D: You must tell her that she must not smoke in the house. I am sure your no smoking sign is going to help. What types of other signs can you make for our class?

Timothy: What about a no fighting sign for our class?

Teacher D: Why do you say that?

Timothy: Because the children in our class are always fighting.

Teacher D: I think that is a very good idea. Can you think of other signs?

Timothy: Yes what about no eating and talking at the same time?

Teacher D: Wonderful. Okay let me see your no fighting sign once you are finished with it and then we will ask the class if they can also think of other signs that we can make for our class.

The outdoor area is friendly to children's creative development. This teacher could have taken a didactic approach to the teaching of signs. However, the outdoor space and flexibility allowed her to position herself as a learner. Merissa becomes the expert who is able to find solutions. Lansdown (2004) argues that creating spaces for children to contribute their ideas and working with them to implement their ideas contributes greatly to children's involvement. This happens because of the sharing of meaning and the valuing of interaction and exchange. Through interaction and exchange between teacher and learner, ideas are transformed and extended (Harris, 2000). There is also evidence of guided participation that is more affirming to children. Through guided

participation, children communicate and coordinate their efforts and children are able to transform their ideas and understandings as they participate in activities (Rogoff, 1990).

When looking at Hart's pillars of participation, it is noted that when co-construction occurs in an enabling way it could fall into the pillar of teacher initiated shared discussions with children. When teacher initiated shared discussions are strong, the teacher knows that children have valuable contributions to make to the discussion and she values their competencies. As such, the teacher extends the learners' capacities to think and thus encourages children to bring their own meaning to an activity.

The evidence presented in this chapter draws attention to how a limiting code operates in Grade R to marginalise the goals of social justice and equality needed for transformation of South African society through the early years. This part of the study confirms that although Grade R is perceived as an equaliser to undo the injustices of the past education system (SA Department of Education, 2001b), the oppressive practices of the past run counter to this aim. This study shows that the insertion of Grade R into basic education is resulting in a type of pedagogy that is consistent with standardisation and a rigid system of performativity and accountability. These conditions set limits on the types and levels of child participation that are possible.

This chapter also shows the possibilities for enabling child participation. Such opportunities are affirming to children and shed light on the role of the teacher as a meaning maker and as a person willing to learn from children.

5.4 Pushing the participation agenda forward

For pedagogic practice, we have two extremes where power and voice are implicated. The findings showed that teacher power and voice were strong in the transmissive approach but became more relaxed when they made attempts to enable higher levels of child participation. To develop a more enabling code for child participation, new perspectives need to be explored. In order for stronger social justice through child participation to be implemented, the curriculum needs to be planned from the platform of real children and not the abstract child. Although the current curriculum does place emphasis on respecting all diversities, this is not optimally experienced in some Grade R classes.

As a way forward, what is needed is a pedagogical perspective where "pedagogy in participation" features strongly (Formosinho & Araujo, 2011, p. 233)- see Chapter 7 for more details. When this type of pedagogic response is at the heart of educating young children, then children's involvement in their education is holistic and inclusive. The dimensions that are engaged with include attention to children's backgrounds, their families and their lived experiences in classrooms. Whilst the concept of "pedagogy in participation" is geared broadly towards respecting diversity (which I believe is a foundational aspect in child participation), the elements for attention can be specifically engaged with to make meaning of how child participation can be brought to the fore.

At the outset, the curriculum needs to be strongly organised to take into account child participation from a holistic perspective and from the organising framework of education for democratic practice. The materials need to create opportunities for children to explore and be curious and they should promote child-initiated inquiry. This needs to be supported by the teachers as mediators of learning. Workbooks must be limited and can be used for some consolidation and application of knowledge and skills. They should not be the first level of intervention for early learning. Hands-on, concrete experiences where processes of learning are valued must become a priority. More open-ended learning experiences need to be explored. The daily schedule should allow

for a balance between teacher directed and child initiated activities where integrated responses are also possible. Within teacher directed activities, children should be given opportunities to use inquiry based and problem solving approaches to learning. This would allow them to explore their plural identities as they construct meaning as participants in their learning. Observations and planning need to be systematic and should include listening to children to help them learn. Teachers need to pay attention to how they interact with children. Both co-construction of meaning and guided participation have the potential for high levels of child participation. Dialogue and relationship building are important to help children make meaning of their life world. These actions are important for teachers to connect with children's needs and interests. The connection between home and school also needs to be explored. More compensatory activities will be required for child participation where the home environment is vulnerable.

5.5 Conclusion

In this chapter I attempted to answer the research question, "How does teacher directed practice shape the nature of child participation?" In the first instance, in the absence of this study one would assume that teachers are active and children are passive in teacher directed practices. We also know that this is not a neat binary - many things happen in between. This chapter has shown the in-between things - nuances of child participation in teacher directed activities.

The main finding illuminated in this chapter is that teacher directed activities shape child participation - which is dependent on multiple variables - in complex ways. These variables are: the impact of a standards-based environment, the image of children in the learning process, how teachers position themselves to the objectives of the lesson, and how responsive teachers are to the children and the actual tasks at hand. In taking a close look at teacher directed activities in Grade R, it was evident that teachers engaged in more restrictive roles as tellers, instructors and transmitters of knowledge in the context of delivering a prescriptive curriculum. When this happened, the children were

given few opportunities to participate in the teachers' agendas. This did not mean, however, that they were total victims of teachers' agendas. They were knowledgeable of spaces they could use to disengage, be unresponsive, to prioritise their own agendas, to be subversive (swear), and to direct the teachers' agenda in particular ways.

Where there were weaker levels of teacher directed practice, the children had more opportunities to participate in active and democratic ways. Teachers were more flexible and therefore were able to position themselves in ways that were more affirming to children's participation. The teachers were able to move more towards positioning themselves as co-constructors of meaning, to develop shared understanding, and to take on the role of learners of children's attempts to make meaning of their life world. The children were able to show their capabilities and participate in agentic ways when teachers were sensitive to them as social actors in the learning process. This stemmed partly from valuing learning as participation.

This discussion concluded with a call for a new perspective on encouraging high levels of child participation. It is my contention that the answer does not lie only with the interaction between teachers and children, but also with the system. The latter needs to be strongly organised for democratic education to occur, thus allowing teachers to become more flexible in their approaches. I proposed that learning should occur from the perspective of "pedagogy in participation". It is important to consider the elements in this perspective in order to enable high levels of child participation in the context of social justice.

This chapter highlighted the role of the teacher as the main actor in shaping how children participate in the process of learning. In the next chapter I present a contrast to this. I show how children take on powerful and agentic ways of actively participating in their learning. The chapter highlights that learning is enriched through the active participation of children.

CHAPTER SIX

YOUNG CHILDREN AS ACTIVE MEANING MAKERS

6.1 Introduction

In contrast with the previous chapter, this chapter highlights the power of the voices and actions of children in Grade R. I use the agency view of children as social actors and pay attention to the ideas of Hart's levels of child initiated and child directed participation together with Lansdown's self initiated participation to be sensitive to children as capable and competent beings.

This chapter shows how children, within teacher created spaces for learning, are able to negotiate their own agendas and participate in ways that show us that they have agency. They use opportunities to empower themselves about their life world. The richness of what the children present to us in this chapter is often missed by teachers who are concerned with meeting outcomes in a standards-based curriculum framework.

In order to show what is weak in terms of addressing child participation, I begin by discussing the theme of children negotiating spaces of control. This is followed by exploring the role of their imagination and how participation is implicated as a tool. The final theme illuminates how teachers' power is perceived by children and how it is drawn upon to gain conformity.

In examining the nature of child participation from the perspective of children, this chapter highlights learning as participation. Children produce knowledge which reveals the processes that are informing their participation. Children are able to actively engage with the concerns in their social and cultural worlds.

6.2 Children negotiating spaces of control

One of the critical ways in which children display agency which makes them social actors in their childhood is through their efforts to be negotiators. Even when teachers are present, children will find the spaces to manoeuvre themselves through their agendas. I found that the best places where the children showed their skill as negotiators were during the times when teacher control was weak. This was during free play. The spaces

in which children initiated shared discussions and showed superior levels of self control were mostly in the fantasy corner, the art area, the block corner and the outdoors area. Through the observations and the study of video recordings, it became evident that children as negotiators were wielding power and control. They were able to attain varying degrees of participation in their learning. This was prompted by but not limited to the priorities that the children set for themselves in the environments that the teachers created for them. Research has noted that children act as agents with a definite purpose in mind as they act deliberately and intentionally (Markstrom & Hallden, 2009; Ebrahim, 2011).

In examining children's use of negotiation as a strategy, it was clear that they were displaying characteristics that were superior to what had been observed as capabilities from the teacher directed practices. When the children played I was fascinated by the way in which they displayed the characteristic of attentiveness. They were watchful of each other. This type of observation helped them to participate in reciprocal/unequal engagements, to make their concerns known and to take decisions to influence their agendas. The example below shows the characteristics mentioned above as a game with rules was negotiated by two boys:

Nazeer: Come it's not throwing, not kicking, only in the basket ball net because it's basket ball. Bounce and we throw it in there but we are not on sides, we are not in teams, nothing.

Jayden: We are just practising. I want to do it like practising.

Nazeer: Uh...practising. We just pass and one throw in the net. I will throw in the net. Listen here. Listen here I want to tell you something. If you like fall or trip you are out of the game. If you like fall or trip neh then you out of the game, neh.

Jayden: Okay then I will do it like how you practice.

This example shows how the issue of practising for a basket ball game was negotiated.

Nazeer had insight into how the game is played - not as a team but with some coordinated actions. In guiding Jayden he showed the eliminations for correct actions - "not throwing, not kicking...not on sides". Jayden recognised the guidance as practicing. He asserted himself and wanted to perform according to his concept of practicing. Nazeer identified with Jayden's concept of practicing and gave more rules to guide Jayden. Nazeer wielded power over Jayden when he used the words "listen here" and gave sanctions "...if you fall or trip you are out of the game". Jayden aligned himself to Nazeer's concept of practicing.

The participation of the children in a space where they had control to negotiate their agendas shows the richness of their thinking and capabilities. Through the strategy of negotiation, which was power laden, the children showed us their skill as communicators, their depth of personal involvement, and their emotional investments. The richness of this type of participation often eludes teachers in a standards-based environment when free play is not adequately appreciated as a space where they can look, learn from children and use their observations to shape their programmes.

From my observations it was also clear that what the children were negotiating was tied up with complexities to further their own agendas. Often when children played, they decided amongst themselves who would give a definition as to what constituted play, who would lead the play and what the rules of the play would be (Sheridan & Pramling Samuelsson, 2001).

Whilst previously the example showed that Jayden was willing to give in to Nazeer's power in a win-lose situation, there were many instances where the children tried to create win-win situations. For example, the children engaged with "I give you and you give me" talks during free play at the fantasy corner. This type of exchange was characterised by bargaining, using pleas and making open calls for help which led to a more balanced satisfaction of need. The example below shows how Waseem's plea for help was met by Noor entering into an exchange that had benefit for him:

Waseem playing on the mat. Noor

approaches him and says...

Noor: I'm the winner. I'm the winner.

Waseem: Do you want to help me?

*Noor: Okay I'll help if you let me play with
your gun.
You mos brought it to school today ne'*

When children in the study used the strategy of negotiation, it was evident that they were emotionally engaged. They gave vent to their feelings and this presented insight into how they were managing their emotions. In my observations I saw how the moods and feeling states were affected in their negotiations and how they affected their participation. In the context of playing games, the children learnt that being a skilled player required spontaneity, responsiveness, some resilience and keeping their emotionality in check. In other instances they were tested in managing their emotions. The example below shows the eruption of emotions as the negotiations and conflict around belongings took place:

*Kaitlin: What do I get when I come to your
house?*

*Letti: You are worried what I give you when
you come my house?*

*Huh! I don't know and you have to give my
clothes back now.*

My doll clothes doesn't fit my things.

*Kaitlin: And I don't want your things. I must
give your clothes back give your sister's
things back. Your sister must give all my doll
clothes back and you must give it.*

Letti: Why?

*Kaitlin: Because my mommy scold me
already. You have to give it back first. I said
you can borrow that thing and I said to your
sister she can borrow that thing.*

Alicia: Now my thing can't come out, Sepho.

*Nazeer: There is a swing for us. You lekka
versin [silly]. Come we play man.*

The study also showed that children's negotiations enhanced their levels of sociability. The conditions created in the Grade R classes did afford children some opportunities to expand their repertoires of behaviours. This is a good starting point for social development. During small group and free play the children had exposure to material such as play dough, construction materials and some manipulatives. The children used the freedom to collectively build original constructions through domination and submissive behaviours. The example below illustrates this:

Sepho: Where is the other dough?

Husna: There is yours. Here is mine. I close my stuff. Huh-uh Amaan don't go so on.

Amaan no! Raihaan can't sit next to you.

The chair is going to break.

Husna asking another child...

Husna: Tamia do you want to play? Here Tamia. I must still work by the...

Husna walks over to another work area concerned about not finishing her robot.

Husna making a robot.

Husna: Is there still more black?

Leah: What black?

Husna: That, that...Give me just a scissor.

Give me also one for Tamia. Thank you.

Excuse me Amaan! Amaan: Sorry.

Amaan throwing some paper at Husna.

Husna: That isn't mine. I threw mine away already. He come throw his stuff by me.

Husna taking something from Tamia.

Tamia: this is mine. I already paste mine. I am just colouring mine black. You must colour in your dinges before you colour all your other stuff.

Husna pointing to another child saying...He want black. He want black. You must first make black. First cut out your thing. You must first cut out your dinges. Hello don't come push your stuff here by me Amaan.

Husna getting angry...Give me my scissor. Don't come take here. Bulelani just come take here my stuff. I'm now gonna tell

Sepho: No Amaan stop making that sound and Bulelani.

Bulelani: I didn't.

Husna: You did. You come blame other children here. Don't laugh it's not a joke. Shh...keep quiet.

The above scenario can be related to Hart's child initiated shared decisions among children. Domination and submissiveness (subtle power) are evident in the parallel and co-operative ways in which the children worked. Alicia dominated the other children in order to meet certain agendas that she felt was of great priority. Dominating the situation, she directed the children as to how they should colour their robots by showing them what to do. In some ways Alicia took on a role that was descriptive of the teacher. When children imitate adult roles, it shows that there is an appropriation of status, power and control (Corsaro, 2003).

Power, control and domination also depend on the context. In the study the games the children played provided a context for them to be competitive. In this context those with dominant personalities were able to push others to achieve certain outcomes. In the example below both Toby and Nazeer took on dominant positions in a volleyball game. Nazeer and Toby positioned themselves as "better" than Damion. In the unequal relationship, Damion became the target for instructions.

Toby: Okay I score.

Nazeer: Wait we show them how better we are than them. We are going to show you how better we are than you's. Throw.

Throw.

*Toby: Teacher Damion don't want to pass
the ball to me. Yor I play volleyball. I hit so
ba... But I don't score. Damion ! Go fetch it.*

It could be argued that the children felt empowered to wield power in adult ways because they were able to gain knowledge from observing adults who displayed levels of power over them and other children. This tells us how attentive and observant they were. Foucault (1977) alerts us to how knowledge is power and plays a critical part in shaping subjectivities. Millei (2005) posits that the architectural plan of the early childhood classroom is filled with controlling techniques of power and control. The children exercise their power and control in areas of the Grade R classroom as they make sense of those that are in control.

Joshua: Eden...do you want to be my friend?

Eden: Why?

Joshua: Because I want you to be my friend.

Timothy: He is my friend.

Joshua: No he is my friend.

High levels of child participation consistent with the above were also noted in the way in which children used their imagination. Imaginative play offers an avenue from which children can express themselves in multiple ways (Nutbrown, 2003). It was Vygotsky (1978, p. 102) who alerted us to the idea that "action in the imagination sphere and in an imaginary situation... all appear in play." He noted that the concept of imagination is developed through play in the preschool phase. The sophistication of children's participation in their life world can be understood through looking at how they use their imagination in play. In the study I found that the children were able to use their everyday knowledge to help them to build the content for their play scripts. In a Vygotskian sense they could transform ideas in the mind and then act them out to stand for something else (Vygotsky, 1978). The children's participation in fantasy play allowed them to recreate scenarios from their realities.

The use of imaginative play gives children a dramatic license to look and project into the future (Corsaro, 2003). This is their time when they can be in charge of themselves and others. The example below shows the working of imaginative minds:

Tarryn: The baby's clothes please. I must iron the child's clothes.

Sepho: And this one. Iron this one.

Tarryn: Sepho it's your baby's birthday today.

Sepho: No Lucky's baby's birthday today.

Tarryn: Lucky today is your child's birthday neh.

Sepho: Okay it's my child's birthday today.

Tarryn: No its fine you don't ...it's her birthday now

Tarryn: I am going to put a dress on. I bought a new dress for today. Lucky where is that klopse jacket that I told you for Lucky's baby today. I mos told her that I bought a dress for her still. I'm making it nice man. Today is her birthday. Sepho, Sepho keep her. I want to put in her arms. This is now her child's dress. Sepho come. It's her child's birthday.

Noxolo: It's my baby's birthday. We are going to the party.

Tarryn: Yes, I'm just dressing her now.

In the scenario above we get a sense of how gender and the imaginative potential of the children worked in a relational way to open doors for participation. Since the play event involved organising, nurturing and care in the context of the child's birthday, the girls took the lead in directing the event. This example shows how the recreation of real life situations cast children as sophisticated beings in their social world. The gendered categories were reconstructed in the children's simple rule-based and gendered interactions. Smith (2002) argues that when children gain competence and experience, they are then able to share responsibility. Paley (2003) states that children create characters in order to solve a problem that is linked to a particular situation of a plot or, alternatively, children join in a group to gain a sense of belonging from that group. Social development through co-operative play is enhanced through participatory

connections in recreated situations.

In practice, the above scenario suggests that Grade R teachers need to understand the depth of children's participation as a social phenomenon which forms part of the child's natural social development. Attention to this aspect allows teachers to gain understanding of how a child is a member of a particular context (Nsamenang, 2008). The child's agentic capacity matures as he cooperates, communicates and exerts influence within different opportunities that he confronts not only in institutions, but in the broader cultural context (Nsamenang, 2008). Smith (2002) claims that children construct their social worlds as participants in social processes. The pedagogic challenge for Grade R teachers is how they might use the capabilities that children display to deepen their understanding of their own pedagogic roles and strategies to advance learning.

During observations of routines, the children also used the in-between spaces where teacher control was weak to display their imaginative roles. For example, as the children lined up after the toilet routine, they experimented with sliding and gliding like superheroes. Batman's glide featured as a test of speed and strength amongst the boys. This form of participation afforded the children opportunities to explore bodily action and transform a rigid space into something interesting. During snack time the children also created monster shapes from their sandwiches. They added sound effects and enjoyed their dramatic exaggerations. Once again, the children used their imagination to transform an official routine into something enjoyable. Participation in these kinds of activities through imaginative activities shows how children prioritize their agendas to make routines fun-filled experiences. Markstrom and Hallden (2009) refer to these efforts of children as the negotiation of the social order set by institutions that young children find themselves in.

The children valued being friends with each other. Even though they criticised each other and tried to influence each other, they held friendship as being important. The example below shows two children that I observed as wanting to be together in most activities trying to negotiate their relationship in the context of fantasy play.

Tarryn: See I'm making a skeleton face. It's hanging on a stick. See there it says. No people allowed. See there it says. And I am bad, so bad. You must run when I come near you. No people.

Sam: Yor you colour your???

Tarryn: But you don't know how to make anything. Sam doesn't know how to make anything. Sam doesn't even know how to make a machine. This is my machine. See here is a sign, it's a X. It's a skeleton face.

Sam: Let me see. Let's pretend to be pirates on the magic boat. Make me a boat.

Tarryn: Now I'm going to make the sand.

Sam: Make me a boat.

Tarryn: See there is a spaceship boat.

Sam: A boat can't fly.

Tarryn: But we will sit inside the boat and fly...

In the study the children utilized power, negotiation and control to direct their play and they also found strategies to secure their friendships. The children were selective in choosing their friends. Their relationships were marked by some form of commitment. From this perspective, Corsaro (1997) shows us that children develop their friendships through communal sharing and through social participation. Additionally, children show us their knowledge about social life.

6.3 Invoking the teacher's authority

In the study the presence of the teacher in the children's play spaces resulted in the teachers taking an instructive role. I observed that where teachers were close to the children during free play, they failed to take advantage of the rich meanings coming

from children's negotiations. However, the teachers were active in communicating with the children when they needed to correct behaviour and/or reinforce procedures. This could be attributed to the fact that teachers' concerns regarding children's play were more about how it was linked to the expectation of children being learners who should learn in certain ways. Their play efforts were interpreted only in the light of progress and achievement in terms of preparatory skills and behaviours for early education outcomes. The example below shows how the children's negotiation of meaning was interspersed with a teacher's concerns for discipline and a specific form of play. In the presence of the teacher, the boys continued to interact and negotiate meaning around getting their aeroplane assembled:

Noor: We must make an aeroplane.

Luke: Can I build with you?

Noor: Yes but...yeah but you must copy us.

Teacher: Right, quiet play Noor: Quiet play

*Teacher: Its quiet play Luke: Come we make
a car*

*Noor: Come we make something else like a
jet neh.*

Teacher: Noor and Luke, it's quiet play

Both Noor and Luke together: Yes teacher

*Noor: I got one for you Luke. Look here how
much bolts I got.*

*Luke: Here's more, here's more. Come let me
put this one in also for you.*

*Noor: No its fine. Wait it's fine. I need this
jet thing. I need this only.*

Luke: You want the jet neh.

Noor: I like this jets.

Luke: Can you make me also?

*Noor: Teacher is gonna say what is wrong
with you.*

Luke: See I'm going to make a double race car like a champion race car. Look here.

Noor: I think that is a little bit small for an aeroplane Luke.

The example above shows how Grade R teachers can miss opportunities to position themselves as learners who are sensitive to children's negotiations. The children's efforts to create shared meanings and representations were ignored as the teacher's only concern was to control the level of noise during the play session. This can be understood in light of Broadhead, Howard and Wood's (2010) point that the national curricula policies in the early years dictate certain ways in which teachers should behave. These authors note that the role of the teacher is seen as one that can transmit the knowledge, skills and understandings that are consistent with the curriculum. We have seen this in the previous chapter. The contexts of learning are under tight control. Teachers look out for desirable normative practices and this discounts the role they can play to inspire children and learn from them. Additionally, teachers also have a dichotomous understanding of work and play. What children do during play must reflect adults' plans and purposes for them to be accepted as authentic. Teachers will watch out for deviations from acceptable practice. Woodhead (2005) points out that conventional relationships between adults and children are laden with authority from adults who regulate children's lives. However, children are not total victims.

Markstrom and Hallden (2009) explain how the preschool is not an area that is fully controlled by professionals as children are also able to interpret the opportunities and resources available to them in preschool in order to claim their agency. Therefore it is important that teachers need to focus on how the relationship between adults and children unfolds and they also need to understand how this relationship is perceived and regulated in different contexts. Holloway and Valentine (2000) alert us to how children will still claim adult created spaces as their own as they negotiate their concerns.

Whilst this held true for the children in the study, they were also aware that in their negotiations to further their aims they could access the authority of a teacher. The children knew that amongst their peers there were powerful individuals who might get their own way. The teacher was the most powerful to bring about certain outcomes. They therefore used references to the teacher to shape their agendas in certain ways.

The example below shows how Noor and Kevin's play with a truck invoked the necessity of sharing - a value that is promoted in educational practice among children. In order to get Noor to comply with Kevin's need, Kevin made reference to the teacher to show that Noor was not upholding the value of sharing:

Noor: I got two spades. Get me also a truck out.

Kevin: Okay don't use your trucks man. Leave the truck.

Noor: Where did you get that spade?

Kevin: There is no more. Come give me this tractor, you take the truck. I'm going to tell teacher you don't want to give. You must share. I'm gonna go tell.

The example below shows negotiation of meaning around a letter collecting procedure. It also draws attention to how the authority of the teacher was invoked to steer actions in a particular direction:

Waseem: Where's the letters?

Kaitlin: Not in the drying rack. By the work we always...here. Here put them here.

Waseem: I must collect all the letters. Thank you for your letter.

Kaitlin: Where is my letter?

Waseem: Where is his mailbox?

Kaitlin: Give me one.

Waseem: You mustn't take it home.

Kaitlin: Now give it here.

Waseem: I'm waiting for all of them. I must collect the letters. I must collect the letters.

Kaitlin: Don't collect mine yet, hey.

*Waseem: Okay. You must give it to him.
Close it. Are you done?*

Kaitlin: How must you fold it?

*Waseem: You must fold it so and so.
Teacher said I must collect. Who is done?*

*Who is done? Because I must collect it.
Teacher said I must collect the letters.*

So everybody please give me now.

In the above example Waseem showed us that he was conforming as he had been instructed to collect all the letters. In carrying out the teacher's orders, he was participating by sharing a decision with the children but he showed dependence on the teacher as a support strategy. In a way his participation with the other children was dependent on the teacher's instructions. In other words, he used the power of the teacher as he saw her as a form of support. Punch (2004) argues that when children want to make a task or activity more enjoyable and acceptable on their own terms, they would resort to the support of the teacher. This is exactly what Waseem did. Baumgartner (1992) argues that children do not always negotiate compromises in their conflicts because they often hand over control of their disputes to adults as they feel that adults are in the best position to handle children. Waseem was well aware of this.

As noted thus far, the children in the study were involved in many power struggles as they negotiated rules and meanings. What has also been noted so far is how the authority of the teacher is used as a tool to gain conformity. The following example is also an indication of child initiated shared decisions with other children. It shows how children contest and deconstruct power structures amongst themselves. The example shows how the boys protected their creations, wanted to show them off and asserted themselves in their play. It also reveals how a girl was positioned as weak and needed to be protected by a male. Like the previous examples, this one shows the understanding that the teacher holds the ultimate power; her power is privileged and rules and sanctions therefore must be followed:

*Zaheer: Iman, now you and me can play.
Don't break up my one neh. Take this out.*

Iman: I was gonna show Husna.

Zaheer: We also want to play. Wait. I want to show Husna this stuff. I want to show her.

Iman: I want to share but I want to show Husna also. Because if I don't show her she is gonna cry again neh Zaheer. You want her to cry again neh Zaheer. Don't let her cry. You's can play with that one but not with this because I'm still gonna show Hamza this.

Zaheer: And when you done showing her you come.

Iman: I want this red one.

Zaheer: No! Man I said no! Don't you listen?

Iman: But I had it Zaheer. I will tell teacher.

Zaheer: You can't make me scared. Go tell teacher. Iman you want to break everything of us. Husna she don't want to share.

Iman: I just need one more. You's don't want to share with me.

Zaheer: But you don't want to share with us.

Iman: I just need one. Now I must tell Husna you broke it.

Zaheer: It's nothing man. Iman let's play. Come Iman bring all the blocks to me.

Iman: I'm going to help you. I'm building my...

Zaheer: Now don't build your one. Build by me man. Come Iman help me.

Whilst the children showed dependence on the teacher's authority for achieving their aims, there was also evidence where they felt confident to reject the idea of calling on the teacher to intervene in their affairs. The development of friendships in preschool is a complex activity. They learn about the potential of being in a relationship, managing

its fluency or uncertainty and the risks involved. The discussion on friends arose from Eden's attempts to work on a solution. Eden was challenged in dispersing his friendship. His agitation/anger is noted when he said that he was "no one's friend" and then "everyone's friend". He asserted his agency boldly and rejected the idea of the teacher as an authoritative figure to modify his behaviour.

Eden: I'm everybody's friend. You must give me a rest everybody. If you don't want to work it out, fine then I'm no one's friend. Work it out. I said work it out. Work it out. I'm everyone's friend.

Timothy: Wait teacher said everybody must be friends.

Eden: So what I'm not scared for teacher.

Another way in which the children rejected the reference to the authority of the teacher was through placing themselves in powerful positions. In children's attempts to negotiate their agendas they overtly named themselves as powerful people and then acted out powerful action to influence. For example, in nurturing roles they took on the role of the mother and domesticated male behaviour. The example below shows how a boy positioned as the "boss" was powerful and thus independent of invoking the teachers' authority. From this position the boy steered actions towards an agenda. This type of power, however, is very fragile and fluid as it moves from one child to another.

Kevin: Who is breaking the stuff? Ibrahim the road is loose. Look here. I'm the boss of the road. No teacher say only four children. Guys I'm the boss. Ibrahim can you make so?

Ibrahim: No (nodding).

Kevin: Ibrahim give me that train back. Give me that train back.

Ibrahim: Wait, wait, wait. This track is wrong. This track is wrong. Okay break the stuff.

Kevin: Huh, uh you can't break all the stuff.

Ibrahim: Break it. Make a new one. Okay

take this off. Guys I'm boss of the road. Guys I'm the boss. Now go get the car there, the bakkie. You Dayaan you can't play.

Kevin: Why he can't play?

Ibrahim: Because I am boss.

Kevin: You must jump on the second monkey bar. Wait. Wait. See how I do it. I do it backwards. Do you want to see. Do you want to see how I do monkey bar backwards. I want to do a swirl.

Dayaan: I can also do that.

Kevin: But you can't do the triple swirl.

As the children participated in play in the above scenario, they used imaginative action to claim their power and they used control to claim their strong position in the play. Children displayed power over who controlled the play as they established how they could protect the interference of the play. In addition to the children using power and control as a strategy, their participation was also evident through the use of competitive behaviour. As the children competed with one another, they also watched out for who possessed more expert skills. In this context, children will exclude those children whom they see as less expert than themselves or even those that are not members of an established group (Broadhead, Howard & Wood, 2010). It could be argued that children show us how they possess the ability to dominate other children whilst they participate in play. The ability to dominate is aligned to assuming power and control as they participate.

It was also evident in this study that the children asserted their independence from teacher intervention and authority through domination and open defiance. Their struggle to make meaning in their lives also invoked negative emotions of anger and lashing out when events did not go as planned. The illustration below during block play shows how children's participation in activities became daring and risky. In the example below, Nazeer used extreme words ("worstest enemy", "dumbest" and "worstest thing") to show his anger and disgust. He was fearless:

Nazeer: Come Iman bring all the blocks to me. Imaan I'm gonna tell teacher you don't want to help.

Imaan: I'm going to help you. I'm building my...

Nazeer: Now don't build your one. Build by me man. Come Imaan help me.

Imaan: Sorry I never saw you. I will break your things also Nazeer. You break my stuff.

Nazeer: Like you the worstest thing. Like the worstest enemy. Neh Imaan.

Imaan: Uh...

Nazeer: You are the dumbest.

Imaan: You the dumbest

Nazeer: She can't even make fun of a person neh. Neh Imaan.

Imaan: I will ask my daddy to come here with the police. You are scared of the police.

Nazeer: I'm not even scared.

Imaan: I will call my daddy Nazeer: Now go call him. Go call him.

Nazeer: Come Iman bring all the blocks to me. Imaan I'm gonna tell teacher you don't want to help.

Imaan: I'm going to help you. I'm building my...

Nazeer: Now don't build your one. Build by me man. Come Imaan help me.

Imaan: Sorry I never saw you. I will break your things also Nazeer. You break my stuff.

Nazeer: Like you the worstest thing. Like the worstest enemy. Neh Imaan.

Imaan: Uh...

Nazeer: You are the dumbest.

Imaan: You the dumbest

*Nazeer: She can't even make fun of a person
neh. Neh Imaan.*

*Imaan: I will ask my daddy to come here
with the police. You are scared of the police.*

Nazeer: I'm not evens scared scared.

*Imaan: I will call my daddy Nazeer: Now go
call him. Go call him.*

The study also showed that children coped without invoking the teacher's authority for intervention when they used the strategy of avoidance. During teacher instructions for quiet play, they subverted the instruction and followed their own agendas. I observed that the children also participated in their own activities by staying out of the gaze of the teacher. Markstrom and Hallden (2009) state that children show different ways of avoiding and ignoring what others have to say and do, so that they can stay out of the control of others.

The discussion on children's efforts at negotiation highlighted their initiatives, capabilities and agency to position themselves as social actors. This is consistent with a step of participation which Hart outlines as child initiated and child directed participation. It is also consistent with Lansdown's degree of participation which is characterised by self-initiated processes (Hart, 1997 Lansdown, 2004). Both these theoretical angles on participation stress the importance of children as initiators of their own projects and/or activities with little or no adult interventions in adult created spaces for learning (Hart, 1997; Lansdown, 2004). These levels of participation need teachers that are sensitive and responsive to the image of the being and the competent child in order to recognise how children's strengths can be used to advance their learning.

6.4 Conclusion

In this chapter my aim was to give life to the idea of children as participants whose agency is valued. The findings as reported in this chapter show that child participation through an agency lens allows us to see children's capabilities. The children in this study were able to achieve their aims and drive their agendas in complex ways through active and dramatic expression of their concerns. They were able to deconstruct and reconstruct the spaces that adults created for them in order to assert themselves.

Specifically, I have shown how the children redefined Grade R as their space. I provided evidence around the children's negotiations through discussing their attentiveness and engagements to make their concerns known. I noted that the children relied on the teacher as a source of authority when they were in control, but that they also found ways to be self-sufficient and independent to drive their agendas. I showed how the use of their imaginations led to sophisticated understandings and steered their attempts to understand and control reality.

All of the above show that Grade R has to be reclaimed as a space for high levels of child participation. The type of participation which Hart and Lansdowne promote as the higher levels of participation was evident in the children's attempts to make meaning of being a child in Grade R. It was through play and using play in the in-between spaces of adult control that the children were able to push their agendas.

This chapter contrasted child participation with high teacher control. It was clear that whilst children still act in agentic ways even if their teachers are present, this is not enough if we are to build a democratic society premised on the participatory rights of children. The standards-based environment of the NCS which the Grade R teachers were following at the time of the study must give way to child participation which is enabled through play.

Learning must be thought of as participation and the creation of knowledge. Teachers can then ask what opportunities they are affording children to participate and how they can learn from children and co-create opportunities for them. Once children are perceived to be competent, then it becomes important to let them plan some of their activities and to apply their own ways of knowing and doing.

If play is a catalyst to bring to the fore children's capabilities, then we should be asking what the status of play is in a standards-based curriculum. Based on my findings, I

strongly argue for play and not just an activity slot on the time table. We need to think about what might be the case. We need to consider the exciting possibilities if play becomes a standard in the curriculum framework. To date this debate has not taken place significantly enough in the South African context. My study inserts itself into stimulating such debate.

CHAPTER SEVEN

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

7.1 Introduction

In this final chapter I provide a conclusion to the thesis by reflecting on the preceding analysis and drawing together key aspects for broader reflection. I begin by outlining the main arguments in my study of the nature of child participation in Grade R in the Western Cape.

I use the key understandings of the nature of child participation as complex and context-bound to open up spaces for new possibilities for thought and action in Grade R. I begin by showing how a study on the nature of child participation stems from the examination of the personal and the contextual dimensions that embed the key issues. This is followed by making a case for the interrogation of images of children in order to arrive at more affirming views that values them as social actors who have power, voice and are agentic in institutions they find themselves in.

Through the findings in this study I argue that the nature of child participation is restricted through a basic education system that fails to engage with the social justice agenda of using the early years to transform South African citizenry. In so doing, I show how this study fills the gap in literature about child participation in Grade R classes. I then look at the implications of the study and future directions.

7.2 The personal and the contextual dimensions matters in the study of child participation

In order to give weight to the above I went to great lengths to show how this study emerged from my personal history. The notion of child participation, children's rights and the will to pursue a study of this nature provides ideas on the dimensions to tap into

for a study of this nature. In setting the scene for the study in the historical context my aim was to show how a particular context needs a focus on the participatory rights of children. Specifically, I noted that for South Africa this aspect is necessary to deal with the injustices of the past and to set in motion democratic practices so that a new citizenry can emerge. The contextual review drives the point that Grade R is supposed to be an equaliser at the entry point of Basic Education. This study on child participation, however, shows that this critical element is not given strong attention as early education in Grade R is not organised with democracy in mind. Rather it seeks to standardise performance through a focus on knowledge and skill acquisition that makes teacher direction strong. One of the reasons for this is the lack of interrogation of the images of children that are used in practice.

7.3 Images of young children needs critical interrogation

This study shows, amongst other things, that the way in which we view children shapes the priorities set for them and actions with them. In Chapter Two I presented perspectives to understand child participation. I did this because I argue that participation is incumbent on the images that adults (teachers and policy makers) have of children. Different notions of who children are and what they are capable of will invite different types of participation.

Drawing from traditional perspectives, I argue that dominant notions of how children develop disable strong participation where children's agency comes to the fore. I challenge the dominant framework of *the child* which positions children as incompetent and lacking in knowledge. When teachers adopt these dominant images of children, spaces are created whereby adults have full control. I argue that universal images of childhood are limiting as they provide fixed assumptions about how adults should work with children. To support my argument, I showed how natural constructions of child participation produce narrow concepts where there is minimal engagement with children as people in their own right and as collaborative beings who live in different contexts. Thus children become the objects of concern for early socialisation in the

context of Grade R. I revealed how actions are about children and for children but weak on participation with and by children.

The sociological perspectives of childhood makes salient the competence of children. Power, voice and agency of children become important to consider in framings for policy, practice and research when a social actor perspective of the child is respected. The ideas of Foucault and Freire were also contributory in foregrounding children as having power and voice. Freire (1970), argues that society can only be transformed if power is distributed to individuals. This can only occur through a liberating pedagogy. Furthermore, cognition is enhanced through dialogue that occurs between teachers and children as co-investigators who are jointly responsible for the success of all that grow together.

In thinking of fresh and new possibilities of how children participate in Grade R, I drew on the theoretical ideas informed by the sociology of childhood, Hart's levels of participation and Lansdown's degrees of participation. The sociology of childhood offers extensive critiques on childhood which stress the importance of foregrounding children as agents. Thus the idea of the child as a social actor contributed as an important perspective in this study. I was able to make sense of children's actions and talk from an asset based dimension where they featured as meaning makers and people in their own right.

For practice I looked at theoretical concepts that afford greater insight into meaning making as a co-construction. For example, I showed how the zone of proximal development, guided participation and scaffolding were important in a study of child participation. I also found it important to make the point that children's participation is tied up with beliefs that adults have of them. A variety of complex beliefs were presented. The alignments with practices were also discussed.

7.4 Researching child participation requires engagement with the complexities of the research process

The qualitative approach using case studies afforded me the opportunity to deal with the complexities of researching child participation. I showed how the use of interviews proved to be most effective for exploring teacher beliefs on child participation. By video-taping the teachers and the children, I also showed how my role as observer and non-participant was difficult to engage with as my position was challenged by not being involved with the children. This occurred particularly at times when they demanded my involvement, such as telling them a story.

Observing the selected children participants in this study also proved difficult as it was challenging to ignore the other children who were not participating in the study. For example, when I analysed the videos of the child participants it was not possible to listen to the voices of and comment on the actions of those children who were not part of this study.

In the main, developing a participatory paradigm for research with children where there was high negotiation and co-construction of meaning with them did not materialize in this study. This is due to the tight time frames for the study and the shortcomings of my skills to actively engage the children. I therefore opted to open up the windows to the children's world through observing and recording their voices and actions.

7.5 The nature of child participation in socially constructed, context-bound and fails to promote Grade R as a space for democratic practice

In Chapter Four I answered the research question: "What do teachers' beliefs suggest about child participation in Grade R?" I offered a context-bound explanation. This began with examining the roots of teachers' beliefs. This dimension shows how notions of child participation are rooted in teachers' memories. I then went on to examine their training and experience to make sense of the approaches, practices and philosophies they were exposed to. This helped to shed light on the messages of child participation teachers were working with, and it also helped to make meaning of the differences between the current curriculum demands and what teachers were sharing as their beliefs. I also

provided snapshots of the teachers' definitions of child participation and the categories of difference such as language, culture and gender to show the complexities of understanding child participation. The theoretical ideas from Rokeach (1968), Perry (1970) and Brownlee et al. (2007, 2008) helped me to bolster my explanations.

The findings of this study show that teachers' beliefs on child participation are complex, messy and context-bound. I showed how different types of beliefs such as primitive, dualistic, derived, multiplistic and relative played out in teachers' talk. It became evident that teachers' past experiences are a source of knowledge and understanding that needs to be taken seriously as it shapes their roles and identities. Even though teachers in the study had training grounded in child-centred practices, they were pressurised to deliver in ways workable in a tightly controlled curriculum which restricts possibilities for strong child participation which is needed for organising Grade R as a space for democratic practices. Although active learning was evident and afforded opportunities for children to participate in activities, there was no reference to children participating in decision making. Moreover, the complexities of class, gender and physical infrastructure affect the nature of child participation and make it difficult to have a one-size fits all approach. Exploring teacher beliefs was a good starting point to understanding the nature of child participation.

In Chapter Five I explained my departure from the traditional way of approaching studies on beliefs and practice in a broad way. I specifically chose teacher directed practices to make sense of child participation. I did this because the sites I worked in had tight teacher controls except during free play sessions. The teachers' beliefs featured in the chapter in an integrated and thematic way.

My research question was: "How does teacher-directed practice shape the nature of child participation?" The theoretical ideas from Hart's (1997) ladder of participation, Lansdowne's degrees of participation, the agency view of the child, Vygotsky's (1978) ideas on scaffolding and Rogoff's (1990) ideas on guided participation helped me to make sense of child participation in teacher directed practices. The findings show that teachers both restricted and enabled child participation, depending on the outcomes

they were trying to achieve, and also how they positioned themselves and the children in the learning process. Where teachers took strong control over shaping the learning outcomes through a focus on learning as an acquisition of knowledge and skills, children's participation as agents was compromised. Expert and novice approach associated with transmission teaching became strong. Passive modes of child participation were evident. In these instances teachers played the roles of tellers, instructors and transmitters of knowledge, skills and values. Children were respondents to the teachers' agenda. This finding is expected in structured lessons. However, there was also evidence of weaker levels of teacher directed practice which enabled more active forms of child participation. In this case teachers were flexible enough to allow themselves to become partners in learning. This study draws attention to weak levels of negotiation pedagogy where participation with active involvement with children is compromised.

In Chapter Six I brought the voices and actions of Grade R children to the fore. I was able to do this because of my perspective of children as agents in the learning process. Specifically, I answered the research question, "What do the voices and actions of children suggest about the ways in which they participate in Grade R?" I showed how the children were able to achieve their own aims through taking an active role to deconstruct and reconstruct the Grade R programme, based on their own understandings. They were able to assert themselves in a space where they were given the freedom to do so. They were able to read situations, negotiate, be attentive and engage with issues of concern to them. Where the teacher control was weak, the children were able to show sophisticated understandings.

What this suggests is that degrees of child participation exist in Grade R classes. The high levels, as noted by Hart (1997) and Lansdown (2004), are made possible when the agenda is handed to the children. Play becomes a medium for the children to explore and they become risk takers and problem solvers. It is important that learning must be thought of as participation and the creation of knowledge. Skills acquisition must make

adequate space for participatory learning, where children are active contributors not of right answers, but of explorations that are open-ended and that afford opportunities for problem solving and finding solutions with and without support.

This study also raised the question of what needs to happen when children's capabilities, rather than their developmental deficits, are brought to the fore. We might want to think about how play moves from a slot on the timetable as an activity to play as standard and pivotal in the Grade R programme. This means that teachers will then have to develop sound approaches to teaching through play. My study shows the importance of allowing this debate to take place.

7.6 Implications of this study

This study contributes to filling the gap in South African literature on the nature of child participation in Grade R. It shows that the nature of child participation is a complex process and that Grade R is not organised for democracy. If we want to truly transform South African citizenry and deal with the inequities of the past then the early years education should be organized for democracy. The latter should not only be written as an aim but more importantly be infused in daily practice which has strong child participation. In what follows, I look at different aspects that need attention to grow a transformative agenda for Grade R.

This study points to the importance of paying attention to the micro-realities in Grade R classes. Drawing from Formosinho and Araujo (2011) what is needed is a focus on Pedagogy-in-Participation with special reference to child participation. This means taking both a systemic and a holistic perspective to pedagogy which also includes attention to teacher development. With regard to practice teachers need to recognise their own beliefs and the effects they have on the children they are educating. The pedagogic space needs to be shared with children so that co-construction of meaning with children is an integral part of effective practice.

For the above to happen the didactic spaces must not just be thought of as the space of what teachers do to children. The mutual respect for both adults and children as learners need to frame participation. This will change in the educational space depending on the expertise required to move learning forward. Such situated practices require empathy which allows for autonomy to be granted to children. However, it must be remembered this type of autonomy is not a “free for all” or the promotion of “anything goes”. Formosinho and Araujo (2011) argue that a pedagogy of autonomy requires adults to be knowledgeable about how to intervene in a variety of zones of proximal development where respect is shown for differences amongst children and their capabilities.

In keeping with the above, it is important to develop context based teacher education which is premised on affirming children’s capabilities rather than working with their deficits. This type of teacher education allows teachers to engage with their own starting points on educating young children, recognizing limitations, interrogating inequities promoted and then reconstructing their practice using the idea that early childhood education in South Africa has a transformatory agenda. As such it requires teachers to use democratic principles, beliefs and values as core to organising practice. A participatory approach to teacher development geared towards shaping the mindset and skills of teachers is favoured.

A stronger conceptual framework rooted in preparing reflective teachers who teach for social justice must be undertaken. More needs to be done in order to combine critical thinking and reflection to make sense of teaching as a complex meaning making task where a social justice agenda matters. It seems as though the *what* and the *how* get preference in teacher development curricula above the *why*. A possible explanation is that most Grade R teachers are under-qualified and experience teacher development at a very basic level. However, this is changing as a Diploma qualification for Grade R has been developed with the possibility for articulating it into a Bachelor of Education qualification. Grade R is being seen as an integral part of the Foundation Phase. Transforming practice through preparing teachers for the complexities in the South

African context is highly possible and most desirable.

There needs to be interrogation of the Grade R curriculum, as the curriculum does not explicitly address child participation in Grade R nor does it have guidelines for organising Grade R for democratic practices. The formal thrust of the Grade R curriculum causes teachers to adopt predominantly teacher directed practices and these practices restrict optimal levels of child participation. A standards-based curriculum also impacts on the restriction of participation. Another factor that impedes participation is the way the environment is designed in Grade R. Not all environments speak positively to the implementation of participation, and this is an area that also needs to be addressed.

Additionally, this study points to the importance of responsibilities of leaders that shape the Grade R system of practice. It is important to consider leadership as a distributed phenomenon. The core elements of distributed leadership is firstly multiple persons involved in leadership; secondly, it focuses on leadership enactment rather than leadership roles; thirdly, interdependence of the leadership enactments by multiple persons, fourthly the importance of proceeding development of distributed leadership and finally, the significance of leadership is connected to educational work (Harris & Spillane, 2008).

For Grade R and the Foundation Phase this means paying attention to the organisational context including the structure, governance requirement, the programme and the staff. For new framings to inform early education it is important to pay attention to the horizontal and vertical leadership that affect what happens in Grade R classrooms in terms of children's rights. At school levels heads of department and principals need to take full responsibility for pedagogic leadership which has the potential to influence Grade R practice. Currently it is not surprising to find that these leaders tend to focus more on formal schooling from Grade 1 onwards. One of the reasons for this relates to the low status of Grade R in the schooling system. On a vertical level the Foundation Phase Subject Advisors must be well grounded in Grade R and open to new ideas.

Currently we are faced with this grouping being appointed in some provinces without the necessary teaching experience in the early years.

There also needs to be a theoretical model of pedagogic participation that is infused with the curriculum. Participation can only become a reality in Grade R if there are meaningful discussions between the Education Department and researchers in early childhood education as to what constitutes good practice that calls for effective participation in Grade R. Based on such an intervention, it is hoped that there will be fruitful attempts to bring participation more strongly on the agenda for Grade R.

7.7 Further Research

This study was limited in the sense that it focused on a few sites for an in-depth understanding of the nature of child participation in Grade R. Future research could increase the sample for a more generalised understanding. This could be approached using a mixed method design.

Since play shows promise for strong child participation, studies dedicated to teaching through play will be valuable in creating understanding of the nuances of child participation. This is particularly important when we consider how prescriptive the South African Grade R curriculum is. We know that children learn through play, but teaching through play is less well known in the South African context.

Currently, play is marked as a segment on the daily programme of Grade R. Therefore play must be planned in relation to reaching an outcome. A standards based approach follows a didactic method to teaching whereby participation is compromised, as was found in this study. In addition to this, there is a need to engage learners in the research process and to involve them in decision making processes, thus gaining perspectives on their active participation. This will address the need to ascertain the voice and agency of the child.

Early childhood pedagogy must be the focus of research in South Africa. We need this evidence to shape effective practice especially in relation to early education for

diversity. More studies are needed from birth to 9 to understand pedagogical approaches and dimensions informing early learning.

7.8 Conclusion

This study afforded me the opportunity to explore participation in Grade R from both teachers' and children's perspectives. Identifying with teachers' beliefs has shown me that not only do individuals differ, but that their beliefs are varied and diverse. The varying types of beliefs and priorities in practice influence teachers to shape child participation in different ways. The fascinating ways in which children brought the Grade R programme to life is worthy of further studies. My urgent plea for practice in the early years is to begin with children's strengths and capabilities. I do believe that therein lies some answers to dealing with the current education crisis in early schooling and moving our democracy forward.

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27 May 2011

Mrs. N Shaik (8831658)
School of Education

Dear Mrs. Shaik

PROTOCOL REFERENCE NUMBER: HSS/0275/011D

PROJECT TITLE: The nature of child participation in Reception Year (Grade R) classes in the Western Cape.

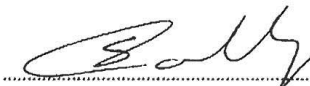
EXPEDITED APPROVAL

I wish to inform you that your application has been granted Full Approval through an expedited review process:

Any alteration/s to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach and Methods must be reviewed and approved through the amendment /modification prior to its implementation. In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number. PLEASE NOTE: Research data should be securely stored in the school/department for a period of 5 years.

I take this opportunity of wishing you everything of the best with your study.

Yours faithfully



.....
Professor Steven Collings (Chair)
HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

cc. Supervisor – Professor Hasina Ebrahim
cc. Ms. T Mnisi/Mr. N Memela



WESTERN CAPE Education Department

Provincial Government of the Western Cape

RESEARCH

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Private Bag x9114, Cape Town, 8000

wced.wcape.gov.za

REFERENCE: 20110517-0095

ENQUIRIES: Dr A T Wyngaard

Mrs Naseema Shaik
7 Crawford Road
Rondebosch East
7780

Dear Mrs Naseema Shaik

Research Proposal: the nature of child participation in reception year classes (grade r) in the western cape

Your application to conduct the above-mentioned research in schools in the Western Cape has been approved subject to the following conditions:

1. Principals, educators and learners are under no obligation to assist you in your investigation.
2. Principals, educators, learners and schools should not be identifiable in any way from the results of the investigation.
3. You make all the arrangements concerning your investigation.
4. Educators' programmes are not to be interrupted.
5. The Study is to be conducted from **20 May 2011 till 30 March 2012**
6. No research can be conducted during the fourth term as schools are preparing and finalizing syllabi for examinations (October to December).
7. Should you wish to extend the period of your survey, please contact Dr A.T Wyngaard at the contact numbers above quoting the reference number.
8. A photocopy of this letter is submitted to the principal where the intended research is to be conducted.
9. Your research will be limited to the list of schools as forwarded to the Western Cape Education Department.
10. A brief summary of the content, findings and recommendations is provided to the Director: Research Services.
11. The Department receives a copy of the completed report/dissertation/thesis addressed to:

**The Director: Research Services
Western Cape Education Department
Private Bag X9114
CAPE TOWN
8000**

We wish you success in your research.

Kind regards.

Signed: Audrey T Wyngaard

for: **HEAD: EDUCATION**

DATE: 19 May 2011

MELD ASSEBLIEF VERWYSINGSNOMMERS IN ALLE KORRESPONDENSIE / PLEASE QUOTE REFERENCE NUMBERS IN ALL CORRESPONDENCE /
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APPENDIX 3

CONSENT LETTER TO THE TEACHERS

Dear _____

I am a doctoral student at the University of KwaZulu Natal (Edgewood Campus). I reside in Cape Town and this study will be carried out in the greater Cape Town area in the Western Cape. The focus of my research is on the nature of child participation in Grade R classrooms. The purpose of this study is to understand how both children and teachers understand participation and how teachers invite children to participate in Grade R. I will be in Grade R classrooms for a period of plus minus six months at negotiated times.

In order to get information I will be conducting semi-structured interviews with the teachers and I will also be using videos to record the interactions between teachers and the children. I will also be collecting data from the children through the use of videos. I request your permission to interview you at a time that best suits you.

Your participation is voluntary and you may withdraw at any time that you so wish. There will be no consequences if you wish to withdraw from this study. All information will be treated in a confidential manner and the identities of the participants and the school will be protected. Names of the participants and the names of the institution will be changed in the final write up of this study.

Thank you

Yours sincerely

Researcher

Mrs Naseema Shaik

Cape Peninsula University of Technology

Mowbray Campus. Cape Town

Tel No 021 6801543

Supervisor: A. Prof Hasina Ebrahim

University of Free State

Bloemfontein Campus

Tel no. 051-4012047

I, _____ (your name), understand the nature of the study and give/do not give permission to participate in the study.

Signature

Date

APPENDIX 4

CONSENT LETTERS FOR CHILDREN

Dear Parent

I am a doctoral student at the University of KwaZulu Natal (Edgewood Campus) however due to the fact that I reside in Cape Town this study will be conducted in the Western Cape. The focus of this study is on the nature of child participation in Grade R classrooms in the Western Cape. I am interested in listening to the voices of the children in describing how they can or cannot participate in the Grade R environment. Their participation for this study is voluntary and they can withdraw from this study at any time if they so wish. All children's responses and information related to their personal histories will be confidential and treated as such. The names of the children and the names of the schools will be changed in the final write up of this study in order to protect their identity. During this study information will be gained from the children in a child friendly manner. As such I will be making use of stories, conversations and photographs. These child friendly techniques will allow me to look at the children's world from a participatory lens and thus provide a deeper meaning to this study. I look forward to including your child in this study as I do believe that he/she will make a worthy contribution and therefore I request permission to include your child in the project.

Thank you

Yours Sincerely

Researcher

Mrs Naseema Shaik

Cape Peninsula University of Technology

Mowbray Campus

Cape Town

Tel No. 021 6801543

Supervisor

Assoc. Prof HB Ebrahim

University of Free State

Bloemfontein Campus

Tel No. 051 401 2047

I, _____ (your name), the parent of
_____ (your child's/ward's name) fully
understand the above.

PLEASE TICK

_____ I give permission for my child/ward to participate.

_____ I do not give permission for my child to participate.

Signature

Date

Thank you for taking the time to fill this form.

APPENDIX 5

CONSENT LETTER TO THE PRINCIPAL

Dear _____

I am a doctoral student at the University of Kwa Zulu Natal (Edgewood Campus). I reside in Cape Town and this study will be carried out in the greater Cape Town area in the Western Cape. The focus of my research is on the nature of child participation in Grade R classrooms. The purpose of this study is to understand how both children and teachers understand participation and how teachers invite children to participate in Grade R. I will be in Grade R classrooms for a period of six months at negotiated times.

In order to get information I will be conducting semi-structured interviews with the teachers and I will also be collecting data from the children through child friendly techniques such as photographs, stories, persona dolls and child led tours.

Both the children and the teachers' participation is voluntary and they can withdraw at any time and for any reason. There will be no consequences if they wish to withdraw from this study. All information will be treated in a confidential manner and the identities of the participants and the school will be protected. Names of the participants and the name of the institution will be changed in the final write up of this study.

Thank you

Yours sincerely

Researcher

Mrs N. Shaik

Cape Peninsula University of Technology
State

Mowbray Campus
Campus

Cape Town

Tel no. 021- 6801543

Supervisor

Assoc. Prof H.B. Ebrahim

University of Free

Bloemfontein

Tel no. 051-4012047

I, _____(your name), understand the nature of the study and give/do not give permission to the researcher to carry out research in the school.

Signature

Date

Hi Naseema

Groupwise is down. So I am using gmail to send this report. I just hope that you will receive it.

There is no real need to write a little explanatory report with it. Your similarity index is 4%, after I had the quotations excluded (before that it was 5%).

The university should not look at the percentage, but at all the places in the thesis where there are similar instances. In my mind these instances are not indicative of plagiarism and are small.

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Kind regards

Corrie Uys

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**The Higher Degrees Committee
21 June 2013**

Language editing of D.Ed. Thesis (Naseema Shaik)

**I hereby confirm that I have edited the Doctor of Education thesis
titled. The nature of child participation in Grade R in the Western
Cape, submitted by Naseema Shaik, Student Number 8831658**

Thank you

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Dr C. M. Kwenda'.

Dr C. M. Kwenda

GET Department

RESEARCH SKILLS DEVELOPMENT SERVICES cc

DECLARATION OF PROOF-READING

CC reg. no CK /16841/23 Name: N.D. Coertze Tel. 0833440706 <u>Postal Address:</u> P.O. Box 5432 Winklespruit 4145	Tax ref. no. 9249/355/20/8 <u>Residential Address:</u> 8 Dreyer Street Panorama Park Illovo Beach
---	--

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

I, NICOLINA D. COERTZE, declare that I carefully perused the following Doctoral Thesis for linguistic errors. I have, to the best of my knowledge, identified typographic, syntactic, idiomatic, punctuation and convention errors and made recommendations to the author for their review and correction.

Author: NASEEMA SHAIK
Email: nshaik@tiscali.co.za
School of Education
University of KwaZulu-Natal

Title of Thesis:

**THE NATURE OF CHILD PARTICIPATION IN GRADE R (RECEPTION YEAR)
IN THE WESTERN CAPE**

Respectfully submitted on the **31st day of December 2013.**

N.D. COERTZE
B.A (English and History), THED, B.Ed.